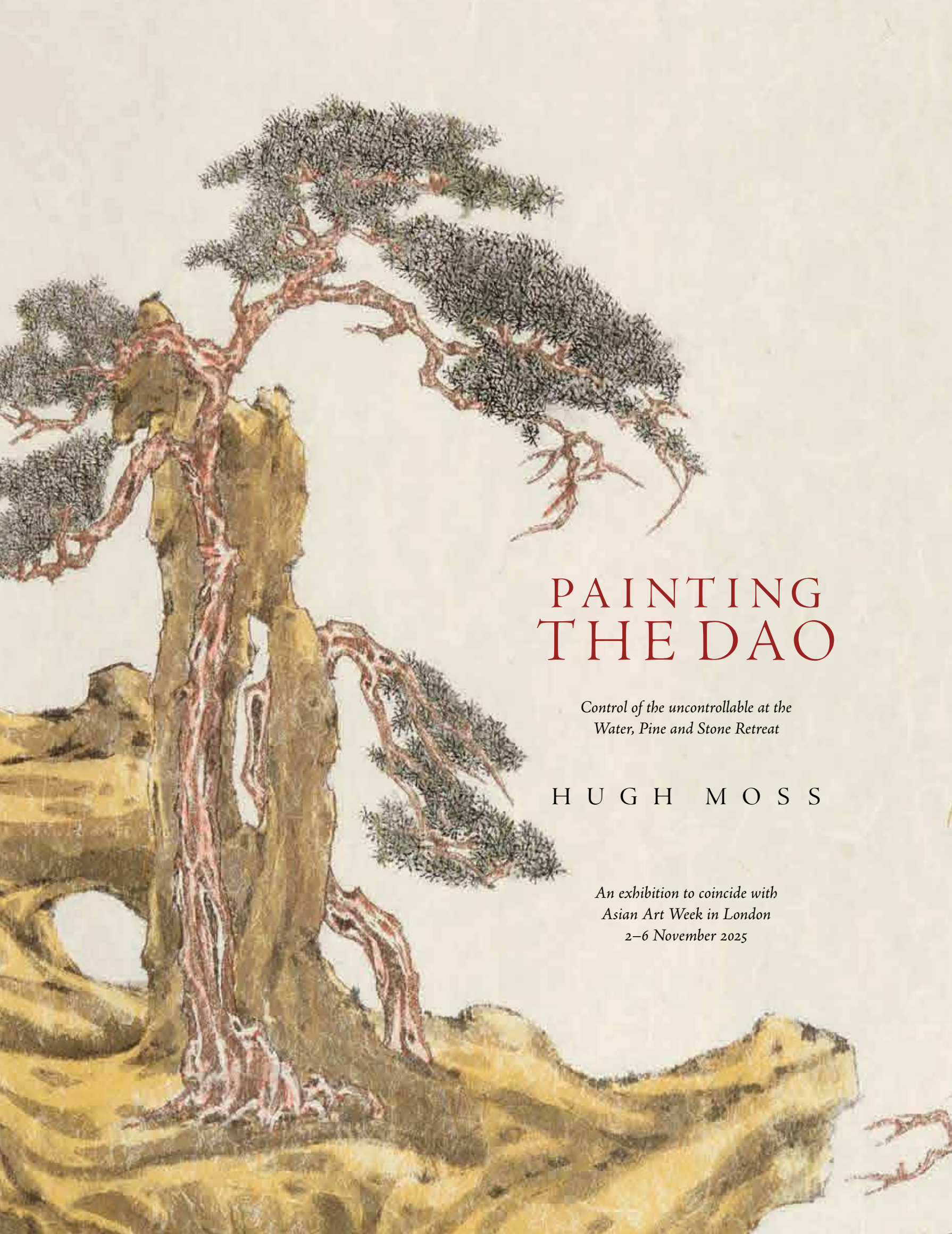




PAINTING THE DAO

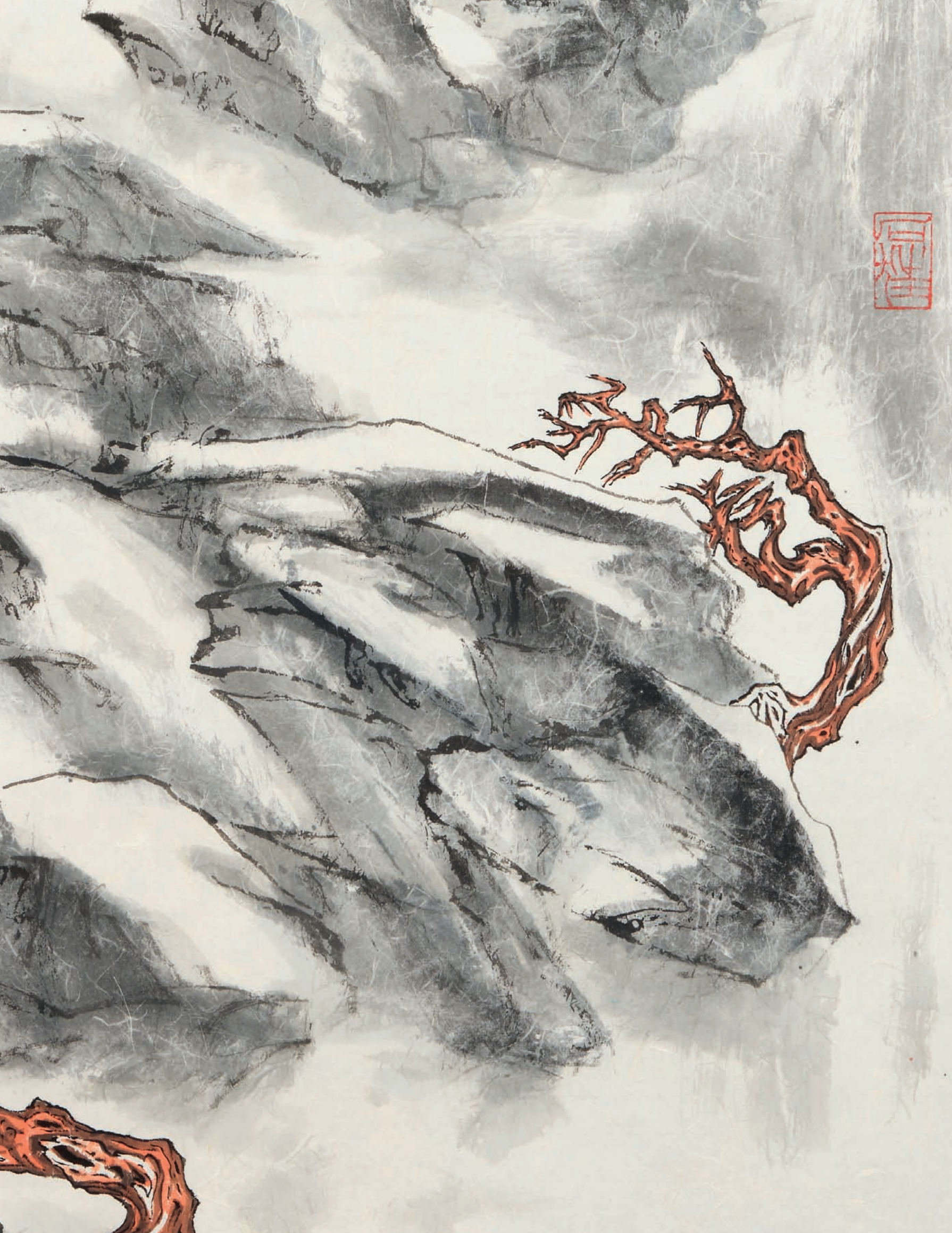
*Control of the uncontrollable at the
Water, Pine and Stone Retreat*

H U G H M O S S

*An exhibition to coincide with
Asian Art Week in London
2–6 November 2025*

If art, the epitome of self-conscious creativity, fails to lead you to transcendence, then what is the point? Creativity is an inherent, perennial itch, and its visible expression is art, but like any other itch, scratching it is not the answer; dig deeply into what causes the itch, and confront it at its roots until the itch becomes the answer.





PAINTING THE DAO

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Bonhams
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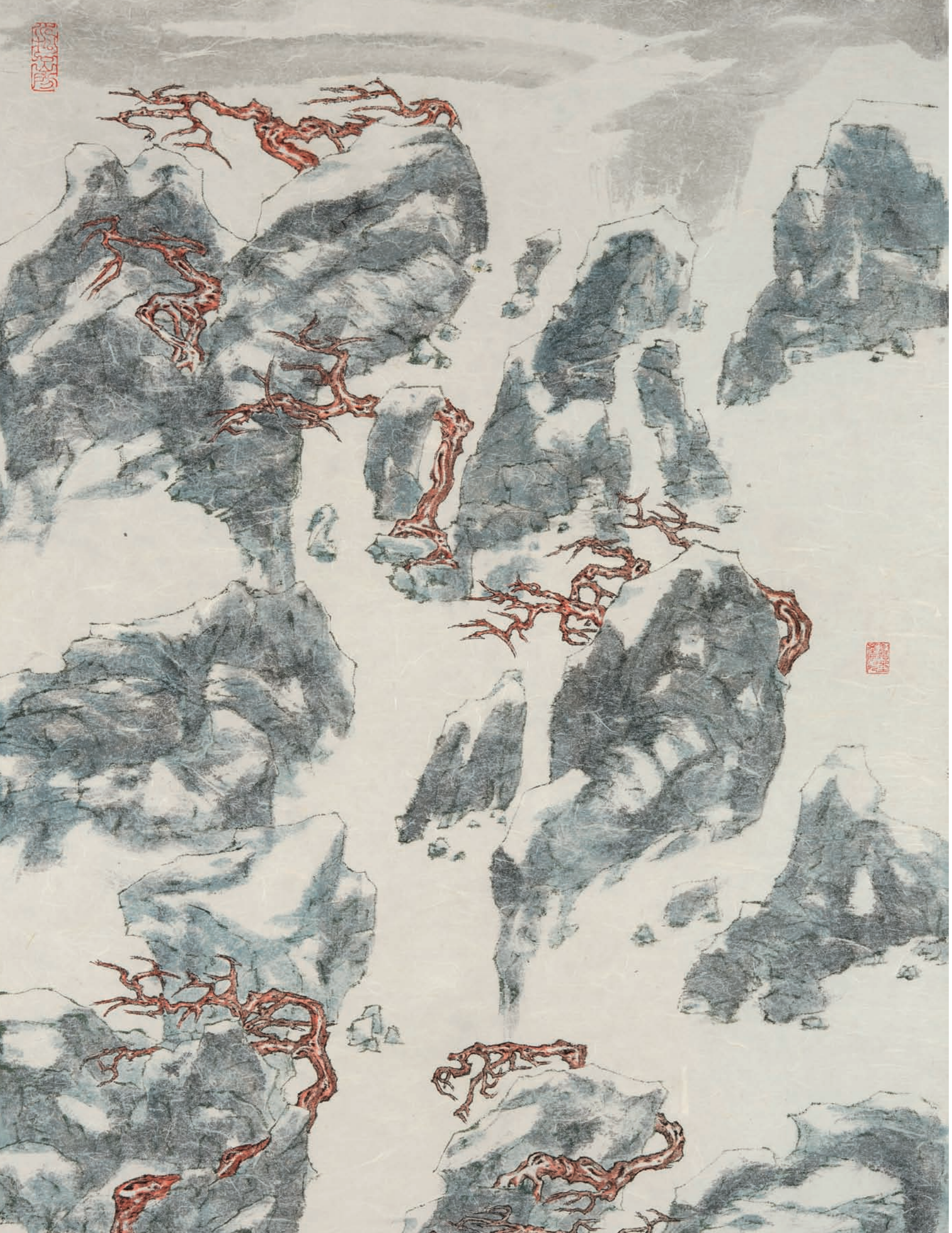
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*Thank you,
you magnificent, precocious, illuminated
and illuminating ink artists,
from Wang Wei to Yesterday,
who broke down the barriers,
who made the audience as important as the artists,
who created the formats and means
that fudged the distinction between the two,
who turned ink into infinity
and transformed art objects into
aesthetic transcendence*

THE MASTER OF
THE WATER, PINE AND STONE RETREAT



Acknowledgements

*Unfettered:
The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at 82
Asaph Hyman*

*Twisted Pines and Crooked Rocks:
Eccentricity and the Literati Eye in the Art of Hugh Moss
Edward Luper*

*The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
Joan Stanley-Baker*

*In a Gourd of Plum Wine
Peter Suart*

Transculturalist Manifesto

PAINTING THE DAO

THEORY

Art and Consciousness

PRACTICE

Learning to Paint

Essence

Authenticity

Breadth and Depth

Media and Formats

Brush in Hand

ALCHEMICAL WEDDING

CATALOGUE

A note on seals

Exhibitions, books and essays, media, collectors

Ancient Forest

The world grew fit
each disciple of the
Silent sage was
surrounded by a
myriad more.
Forests of meaning
grew up everywhere
And matured into gnarled
old trees of truth
While the river flowed
timidly by reflecting
slips of a few
bark as it gently
washed smooth the
word.

Analysis of
Kiku's master
Jinmu's at the
Wakko Zōshi
Library 1993



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

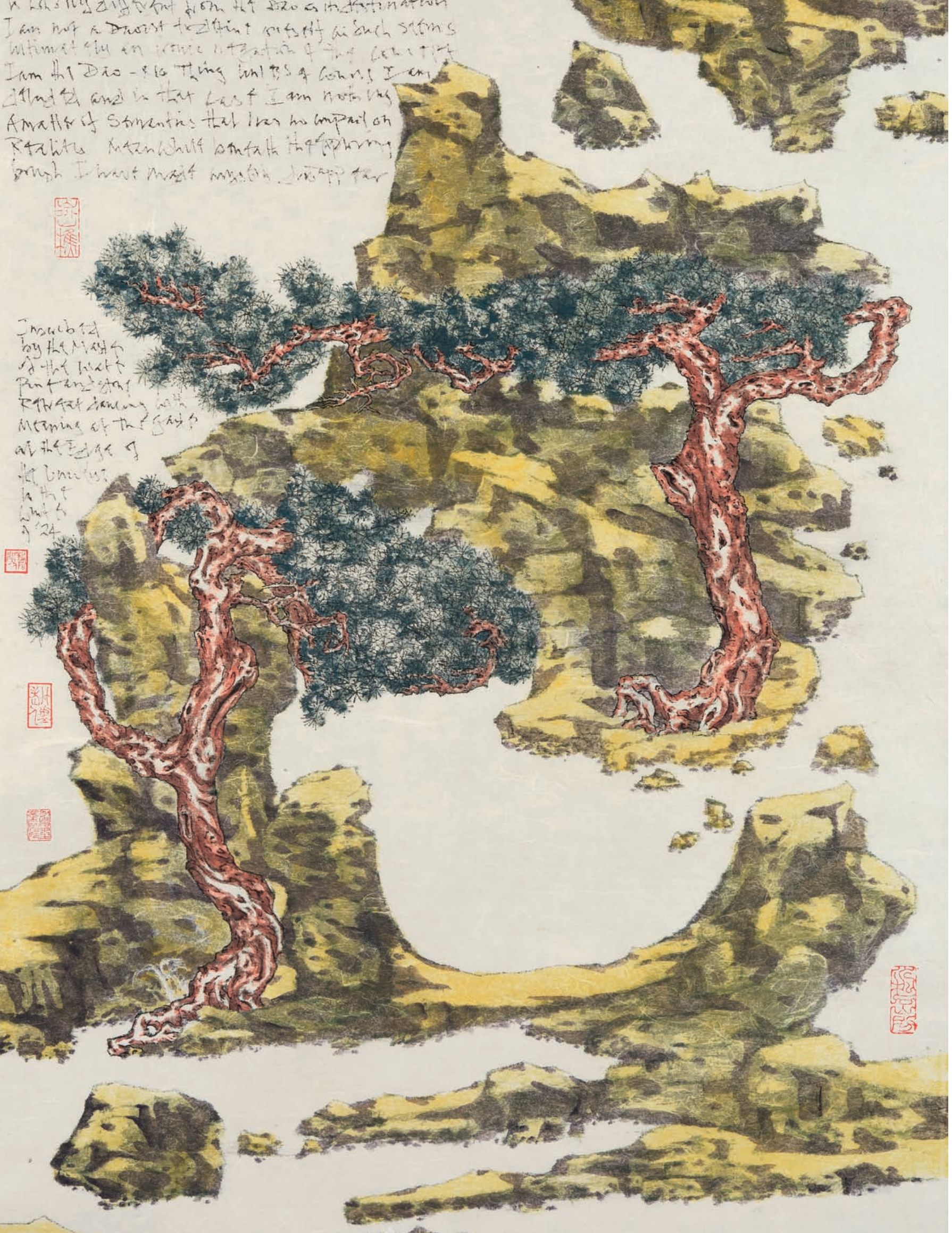
THE ARTIST WOULD LIKE to thank all those who have encouraged and supported him for nearly half a century, and the galleries who have presented his works to the public, including Rasti Fine Art (Hong Kong), Ping Art (Taipei), K. Y. Ng (Hong Kong), who exhibited his collection of my paintings at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 2022, Zeng Fangang of Yi-yuan Space (Wuhan), Zeng Fanzhi and his curator Gladys Chung, who helped to organise the recent one-man exhibition at the Qintai Art Museum in Wuhan, James Lally of J. J. Lally & Co. (New York), Nicolas Chow, Worldwide Head of Asian Art at Sotheby's, Asaph Hyman, Global Head of Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art at Bonhams, who generously offered to host the present exhibition, Edward Luper, also of Bonhams, and Emily de Wolf Pettit of Peking Art Associates (Beijing). He is also grateful to Joan Stanley-Baker for her long-standing friendship and for her article in this catalogue, to Prof. Tong Hoi-chiu, former curator of Chinese paintings at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, who has included the artist's works in several exhibitions of Hong Kong ink art, and to the many collectors who have spread his paintings around the world.

Peter Stuart has, in his usual impeccable and alarmingly efficient manner, taken the burden of editing, designing and producing the catalogue off the artist's hands. He has been his literary guardian for many years and is the only editor he has ever had whom he did not at some point harbour dreams of throttling. He also kindly wrote the brief and arcane text in the style of the artist's painting inscriptions that appears here, which, in common with those, is best approached at a tangent.

I am not a dwarf to think myself as such seems
 intimate to an even greater of the country
 I am the Dao - the thing that is of course I am
 of the earth and in that last I am not very
 A matter of something that has no impact on
 reality. Meanwhile beneath the appearing
 though I have most visible. I am far



Inscribed
 by the Master
 of the West
 Point and of the
 Rth of the
 meaning of the
 at the edge of
 the land
 in the
 of '24



UNFETTERED

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at 82

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN said that the past informs the present and future. However, here Hugh Moss, painting under the name the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, sets out his manifesto on overcoming boundaries. As the son of well-known dealer in Chinese art Sydney L. Moss (1893–1980), himself an amateur watercolourist, Hugh became a lifelong student, dealer, collector and theorist, his main influence as an artist derived from the Chinese ink-painting tradition.

In the following pages Dr Edward Luper considers the artist's work through the lens of eccentricity and the literati eye, followed by Professor Joan Stanley-Baker's reflection on the contrasting evolution of spirituality in Chinese and European paintings and the transcendence of boundaries, and Peter Suart's evocation of the spirit of the literati in a prose poem on art and memory. Hugh Moss then sets out an ambitious Transculturalist Manifesto and expositions of his theory and practice. It is a brave act of any artist to expose the results of their creativity, and even more so, their thought-process and theory, to the scrutiny of beholders and the judgement of time.

Hugh's works are widely admired and particularly known in the Far East, where multiple exhibitions in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong culminated recently in an extensive one-man show at the new Qintai Art Museum in Wuhan in the summer of 2024.

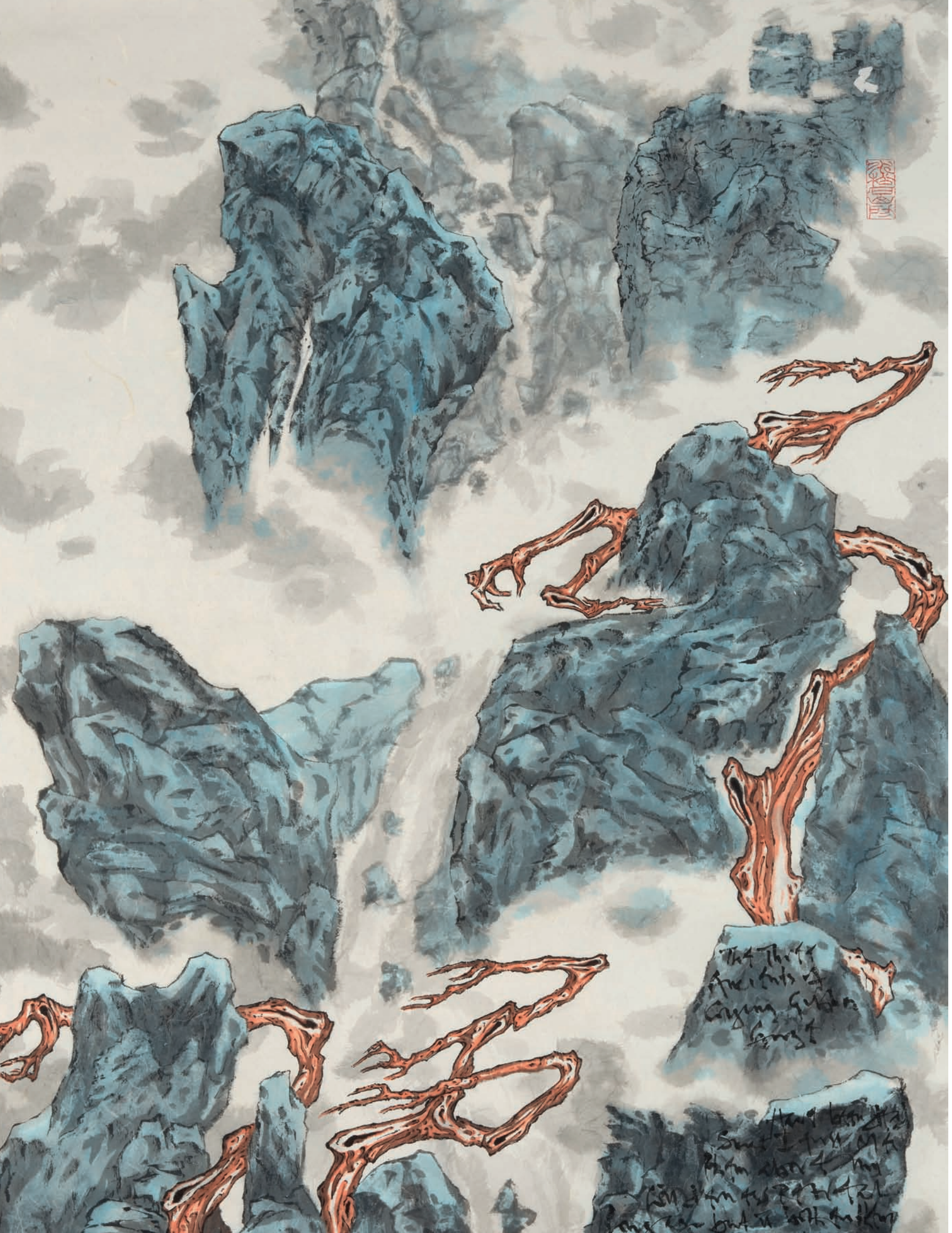
After long association between Bonhams and Hugh, we are delighted to present his first one-man exhibition in London. This is with the conviction that his contribution to the Chinese ink-painting tradition and to the crossing and dismantling of global boundaries is meaningful, and that the art theory that permeates his work in what appears to be an increasingly fragmented world is all the more precious and timely.

Asaph Hyman

Global Head, Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art

Bonhams

AK24.90 136–7



Red seal impression in the upper right corner.

That there
are but a
few good
trees

Some have been
seen to grow on the
mountain side & may
be found in the
valley but it is not known

TWISTED PINES AND CROOKED ROCKS

Eccentricity and the Literati Eye in the Art of Hugh Moss

Edward Luper

IN THE CLASSICAL Chinese aesthetic tradition, eccentricity was not deviance but refinement. To be eccentric was not to seek attention, but to express an inward authenticity: the flowering of personality through brush and stone. As Michel Foucault argued, our admiration for eccentricity lies in our belief that there is a truth made inaccessible by our dependence on rationality.¹ From Daoist sages to literati painters, those who dwelt among crooked pines and strange rocks did so not as outsiders, but as connoisseurs of the irregular and the essential. Chinese connoisseurship developed not only an acceptance but a reverence for the idiosyncratic, especially in the world of *guaishi* (怪石), scholar's rocks prized precisely for their asymmetry, strangeness and singular form.

Hugh Moss, long celebrated as a dealer, collector and theorist, is also a painter. Under the name Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, Moss has developed a body of work that speaks with subtlety and eccentric force as it transcends normal categories of East and West. His ink paintings of scholar's rocks and twisted pines are neither imitations of the past nor polite tributes. Rather, they are animated by the same aesthetic impulses that moved artists like Mi Fu (1051–1107), Bada Shanren (1626–1705) and Wu Bin (act. seventeenth century): an eye trained to the marvellous, and a brush that delights in strangeness.

Two Chinese terms help illuminate this aesthetic. The first is *qi* (奇), a character with a wide semantic range: it can mean strange, marvellous, ingenious, rare or exceptional.² *Qi* was a prized quality in Chinese art, especially within literati circles, where it indicated not oddity for its own sake, but the presence of a certain refined and discerning spirit. A scholar's rock might be described as *qi* because of its bizarre form, its suggestion of mountain ranges in miniature, or its resistance to easy interpretation. A brushstroke might be called *qi* if it revealed a hidden vitality or sudden

AK24.109 148–9



Water, Pine and Stone Retreat Collection



Ten Views of Lingbi Rocks (detail)
Wu Bin, c.1610

freedom. In both cases *qi* pointed to something that transcended the conventional and the formulaic.

Closely related is the term *guai* (怪), which carries meanings such as strange, grotesque, uncanny or even monstrous. While *qi* often implies a marvellous singularity, *guai* suggests an aesthetic that verges on the unsettling or the absurd. It is frequently used in reference to rocks (as in *guaishi*, 怪石, 'strange stones'), and reflects a taste for forms that disrupt symmetry, regularity and normative beauty. Yet even *guai*, in the Chinese tradition, was not excluded from serious connoisseurship. Quite the opposite: it was recognised as an important aesthetic category, especially in Daoist, Buddhist and literati contexts, where the grotesque could signify natural spontaneity, spiritual independence or even cosmic resonance.

The importance of eccentricity in Chinese art was both philosophical and social. Daoist thought prized naturalness (*ziran*) and non-action (*wuwei*), encouraging artists to abandon artificial polish in favour of spontaneity and freedom. Chan Buddhism valued sudden insight and unorthodox expression, often embracing the broken, the awkward or the wildly expressive as signs of inner awakening. In both traditions the irregular was perceived to be more truthful than the refined. In literati culture this became a mark of personality and authenticity. Artists cultivated eccentricity not to provoke but to distinguish. They chose subjects such as twisted trees, weathered stones and awkward compositions because these forms resisted conformity and suggested a world beyond appearances.

Few artists expressed this more vividly than Wu Bin (act. 1590–1626), the late-Ming painter of *Ten Views of Lingbi Rocks*. His monumental handscroll presents ten strange stones, each isolated in space, their jagged forms rendered with obsessive detail. These are not landscapes in miniature, but eccentric personalities, portraits of *qi* and *guai*. Wu Bin's scroll was not a marginal curiosity; it belonged to a world of cultivated taste where grotesquerie was admired.

This obsession with the strange extended beyond painting into narrative. In one story, 'The Ethereal Rock' by Pu Songling (1640–1715), the Qing-dynasty master of the strange tale, a collector is offered a beautiful and unusual rock – dark, misty, shaped like a miniature cloud-wreathed mountain. The price? Several years of his life. He accepts immediately. The tale is fantastical, but its sentiment is grounded in truth: the literati desire for the rare and wonderful could override even mortality. To possess the truly strange was to brush up against the sublime.

Moss's paintings channel this same spirit of cultivated eccentricity. His rocks are not naturalistic but stylised and theatrical, their oddness amplified, sometimes verging on caricature. His pines bend with expressive contortions, stylised into loops or jagged silhouettes. The compositions are often playful, but the playfulness has lineage: it echoes the visual liberties taken by artists like Bada Shanren, Shitao or Jin Nong. One of Moss's more quirky gestures is his use of English text brushed in a calligraphic style mimicking traditional Chinese inscriptions. These lines – aphoristic, philosophical or gently ironic – appear as integral elements of the painting. They fold western language into eastern form, becoming visual and conceptual counterparts to the strange rocks themselves: unexpected and layered. Moss's work belongs to the tradition of eccentric innovation.

At the heart of this lies his philosophy of painting, rooted in Daoist thought and the practice of *wuwei* (無為), or 'non-action'. Moss's essays often speak of spontaneity and spiritual freedom, of painting as an act that arises not from effort but from attunement. In this context, his eccentricity is not contrived. It is the natural result of a practice that seeks resonance over representation, spirit over likeness.

His dual role as collector and creator further deepens this resonance. For decades Moss has championed objects that defy symmetry: strange stones, weathered roots, *zitan* brushpots with unexpected graining. His painterly imagination is in conversation with these objects. He does not merely depict the scholar's rock; he thinks with it. In doing so he reanimates its ancient function: as an object of contemplation, a metaphor for individuality, a stage on which the drama of aesthetic strangeness plays out.

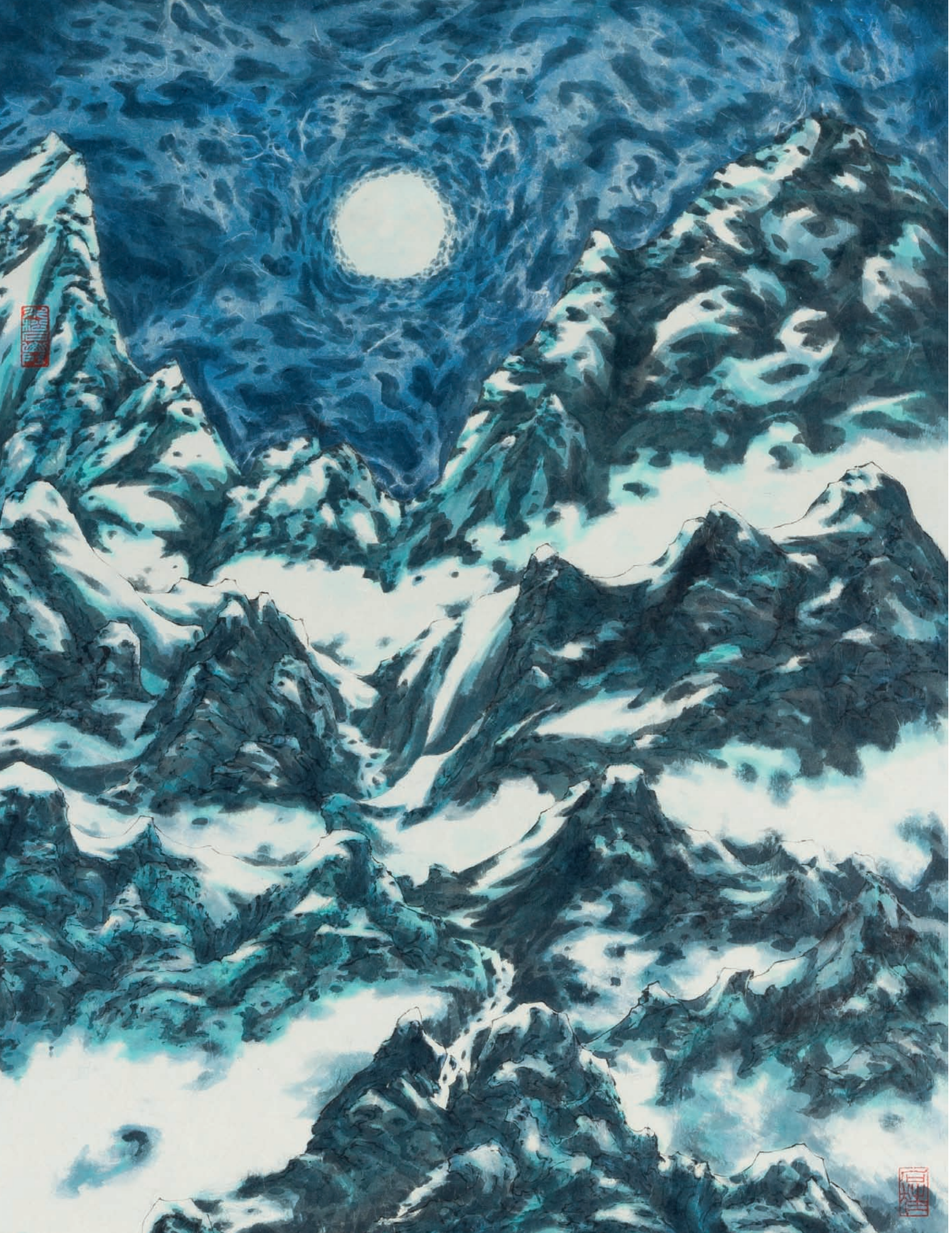
In a world increasingly drawn to smoothness, polish and digital precision, Hugh Moss's art reawakens the eye. It resists the easy, the polished and the expected, and in so doing teaches us to look again closely. His art requires attunement, the kind cultivated over a lifetime of looking. In its refusal to conform it echoes a lineage that saw eccentricity not as an anomaly, but as a sign of truth. Moss does not merely celebrate the strange; he inhabits it. And in doing so he extends the literati tradition by living within its most essential value: the freedom to be marvellously, irreducibly *eccentric*.



Fish and Rocks, Bada Shanren, dated 1699

¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London and New York, 2001)

² Katharine Burnett, in her thorough examinations of the term *qi* (奇, strange, original, eccentric), argues convincingly that within art and literary circles *qi* should be best understood to mean 'original' rather than 'eccentric'. See K. P. Burnett, 'A Discourse of Originality in Late Ming Chinese Painting Criticism', *Art History*, 23/4 (2000), 530



THE MASTER OF
THE WATER, PINE AND STONE RETREAT

Joan Stanley-Baker

ART REFLECTS THE STATE of the artist's soul. Individually and collectively, states of consciousness evolve through time, experienced by humans as the passage of events, internal and external. Historians of art looking at painting across the world over the centuries look not only for differences in content, style and technique, but for gradual shifts in world view and collective consciousness in specific cultural groups. This has been called 'Period Style', seen in the visible but silently felt in the invisible feeling that transcends visual details and generates particular qualities of energy that radiate through the visible forms and movements.

In the evolution of Chinese painting, for instance, works of tenth- and eleventh-century art that survive in the world exude the highest sense of spirituality not only in the history of Chinese painting but in painting history worldwide. Specifically, paintings of the Five Dynasties and Northern Song periods produced breathtaking works that inspire in the viewer a deep sense of awe as well as profound reverence unmatched by paintings of other times or places. What is this special quality we call 'spirituality'? It is seeing with inner eyes the infinite space that is alive, feeling over one's skin, with hairs on end, the gentle chill of the living universe breathing. The self is instantly reduced to a tiny speck in the all-embracing immensity, lost in wonderment and veneration by just being in creation. Not by coincidence did the Chinese cogitate upon the structure of the universe and its operating system (called *li* 理) even as the devout in Europe were expending decades on the construction of stone cathedrals in which pews resembled rows of ants in a forest of giant trees. Clearly, European consciousness was moving towards a high point of spirituality in which the Lord, like nature in China, was revered as the highest consciousness by far, humanity held as part of creation and reduced to minuscule dots in the arched and vaulted cosmos of divine presence.

AK24.20 130-I

This sense of overwhelming awe could not be expressed in European painting, which focused largely on visible material forms and visages – divine, royal or aristocratic subjects – the compositions mainly narrative in nature and painting's purpose being the satisfactory depiction of specific human-based moments or events to serve a didactic end. Art patrons aimed at elevating the viewer's soul to a higher level of faith (as in iconic church murals), or towards deeper visual enjoyment when looking at themselves disporting in particular activities (like modern snapshots). In European painting of the medieval and Renaissance periods we see technique developing in stages, the art always commissioned by patrons with stipulated subject matter, allowing artists little creative room to develop their inner vision.

In ancient China patrons had higher respect for painters, who used the same pointed and pliant fur-tipped brush that they, the elite and highly educated gentry serving emperors in high office, used in their imperial work. They all knew the fifth-century treatise on the irreplaceable spiritual benefits of landscape painting ascribed to artist-writer Zong Bing (宗炳 375–443), which described how unrolling a landscape painting and travelling through its misty mountains and dales could revitalise the spirit, the viewer's now aged body climbing up and down different sections of the painting, walking through dappled light or passing windy cliffs to breathe gusts of refreshing mountain air. The experience made viewers feel that they had actually traversed these beautiful bits of wild uninhabited nature and had come to experience existence itself. This famous essay was often cited and the Chinese intelligentsia acquired a taste for eremitism that can be compared to spiritual sojourning, especially in the Daoist world where adepts would vanish into the distant high ranges seeking ways to prolong physical well-being in order to stay alive for centuries.

By the Northern Song dynasty, the imperial court had raised landscape painting to primary status, above figurative painting, giving artists complete freedom to roam wherever they fancied, with full power of expression. From the later tenth century onwards, landscape painting supplanted portrait and figurative painting, which had dominated before then. The act of painting changed in nature and quality from being a second-hand exercise of copying known three-dimensional objects or subjects to a direct first-hand adventure in sheer creativity, manifested as the metaphysical spirit (or law) of creation itself, beyond all visible details grasped by the eyes. Art shifted from depiction to expression, from doing to being, from second-hand to first-hand, from seeing to feeling, experienced in the heart, not the mind.

The move from spirituality to materiality gradually and steadily enlarged the presence of houses and humans, shifting focus from being in nature to doing human things and to man-made environments, as it were moving from heaven to earth, from creators to creatures, until the twenty-first-century focus stiffened to machines and machine-generated images and activities. In this manner, over the centuries painters thickened the spacetime-deepening transparent perceptual experience of living space with ever more opaque cloud forms, and by the Qing dynasty these clouds acquired silken linings that, in the long reign of the Qianlong emperor (r.1736–1795), gained total independence to dance and pirouette across otherwise stone-still scenes of troop review or imperial gardens. This Manchurian emperor grew up learning Han Chinese, and diligently practised Chinese calligraphy and poetry, wishing perhaps to out-Chinese all Han officials at court, displaying his deep familiarity with the highest layers of traditional Han culture and filling his collections with all the famous works ever praised in ancient texts.

Hugh Moss's father was the famous London art dealer Sydney L. Moss, and he grew up surrounded by Chinese antiques, meeting many experts in the field as a child. These objects were not only the merchandise that sustained the family in England; they also spoke of traditions that although far distant were alive. And more than most sellers of exotica, Hugh became increasingly fascinated by the spirit behind these interesting objects, familiar to him and yet speaking such a different music.

I first met Hugh in the early 1980s whilst teaching Chinese and Japanese art history at Taiwan University, having been positioned into the Department of Foreign Languages instead of History. Hugh was by then much interested in contemporary Chinese painting, which I thought odd for a dealer in Asian antiques. He was becoming increasingly engrossed in brush-painted works, delving into the process of creativity, the nitty-gritty of values and techniques in contemporary Chinese painting and calligraphy. In this manner, Hugh's attention and learning shifted from products to processes.

By then I had met the great New York collector of Chinese literati painting CC Wang (Wang Jiqian 王季遷 / 王己千 1907–2003), a major painter of the literati or *wenren* (文人) school who, to my mind, had reached the pinnacle of the genre beyond all his predecessors. Here literati painting is understood as 'emulating the quintessence of past masters', notably the eremitic Daoist masters who had been trained for public office using top-notch calligraphy but were denied such by the Mongol conquerors

who tried to bypass the ancient Chinese bureaucratic establishment and rule in their usual nomadic manner, which decision resulted in one of the shortest dynasties in China's long history. A great many highly educated sons of the gentry remained confined to their homes, painting landscapes for self-amusement and self-expression with the high skill of their calligraphic training.

Since the early Ming, when gentry amateur painters like Shen Zhou (沈周 1427–1509) began trying to show mastery of the 'brush spirit' (*biyi* 筆意) of the four or five Yuan-dynasty 'unemployed' masters, since immortalised in the annals of Chinese art history, literati painting in China had become bound to the ideal of grasping the essential brush spirit of such Yuan or Song masters. This ideal was like trying to imitate the very voice of the master. Literati or *wenren* painting thus tied Chinese painting down to this second-hand exercise for the following seven to eight centuries, and to the present day. In China the curse of bound feet, that had imprisoned 'well-bred' women for a thousand years, was abolished with the overthrow of the imperial system by the Republic, but the bound mind that confined ideals of beauty in China to second-hand imitations continues to constrict the search for truth and beauty to this day.

CC Wang, like all other Chinese painters, remained mind-bound in emulation of the old masters, the focus of delectation being on brushwork – *bimo*, brush-and-ink – the idiosyncrasies of an artist's brush use. Since becoming self-revealing in the fourteenth century, brushwork served as the artist's voice, instantly recognisable in connoisseurship.

What is this fuss over brush spirit, CC? Here I am looking at a bird on a branch, which is interesting, and there, where you pine in ecstasy, I see only a boring branch, no birds. Now came CC's mind-blowing reply that opened for me an entirely new world no one in our Princeton years of academic art history had ever mentioned: the tiny secret world of the literati circle of cognoscenti who focus mainly on brushwork itself.

Ah, Xiaohu, you have missed the whole point of Chinese painting. You look at painting the way, doubtless, you 'watch' Chinese opera, enjoying all the acrobatics and swordplay. But in China painting is not for seeing its content, but for imbibing its quintessence, which is the brushwork. You go to the opera to watch the external action, but I go there to listen, eyes closed, fixed on the life in the voice of the singer. Brushwork is the voice of the artist! Look at these two branches you just mentioned. The brushwork of the branch with the bird you like is entirely flat, the

brush is clearly slanted to one side and the stroke is lifeless, whereas this branch is three-dimensional, rounded, full of tensile strength that gives it life throughout its length.

CC told me this great secret after I'd come back from four years in Japan as a professional art critic and had looked at many ancient works at close range, something impossible in our Princeton classroom with only small and fuzzy black-and-white photos in the Siren volumes, or slides on a screen.

I talked about CC Wang as the last literati painter as well as its greatest ever exponent with Hugh. Although CC was already selling his paintings to friends in New York by himself, I thought it would be interesting for him to be represented by a London art dealer. I also urged Hugh to meet Ho Huai-shuo (He Huaishuo 何懷碩 b.1941), whom CC Wang told me had mastered excellent brushwork, both in writing and painting, saying that I should study with him if ever I moved to Taiwan. We went to visit Huai-shuo and met his vivacious calligrapher wife Tong Yang-tze (Dong Yangzi 董陽孜 b.1942), whose dynamic flourishes of the brush instantly impressed Hugh. He took on both artists, representing them worldwide, and very quickly became agent for some of the more colourful new lights in the contemporary art world of Taiwan. He studied with them avidly, beginning with the more athletic aspects of modern Chinese brush arts.

Liu Kuo-sung (Liu Guosong 劉國松 b.1932) was a revolutionary type wishing to modernise Chinese painting and free it from the millennia of brushwork reverence that had made literati painting a precious 'secret garden' appreciated only by seasoned aficionados, incomprehensible to the untrained eye for centuries. Liu was creating dynamic works, inventing textured papers with natural fibre marks which seemed 'made in heaven', an instance of the natural, unfettered naivety so treasured in Chinese art. Hugh found Liu an exciting artist from whom to learn more about Chinese painting.

Other artists I introduced to Hugh included the silent genius architect-painter Chen Chi-kwan (Chen Qikuan 陳其寬 1921–2007), who revolutionised (without intention) the values, scope, technique and functionality of Chinese painting, but who has yet to be accepted as a supreme painter in the annals of Chinese art history.

Hugh has often greeted me with the happy announcement that he was pursuing the best of contemporary Chinese painters, and was on the way to fathoming something of their tradition, their inner goals and methods. And he has been true to his word, following as best he could, whilst at

the same time serving as agent for some artists and improving their lives immeasurably, for now these Taiwan artists found their works on sale in London art circles, and for prices they had never dreamed of. Regarding his so suddenly transforming their financial status, Hugh said,

They are artists just as great as painters in London and New York. Should they sell for low prices because they use ink and paper rather than oils and canvas? I find their paintings beautiful, interesting and good, and often of deeper inner meaning than I can find elsewhere, so why shouldn't I sell them by the same standards as works by western artists?

All very true. Hugh introduced living Chinese artists to the West and they became an integral and active part of the international art scene, raised to the sphere of the exalted and no longer able to sell their works at the affordable prices that their Taiwan friends and admirers had enjoyed. Hugh quietly revolutionised the art market for contemporary Chinese painting and calligraphy, catapulting these millennia-old art forms into the urbanised modern world of the West, gradually earning them equal value and winning the respect of viewers and buyers in Taiwan, London and New York. He saw and quickly grasped the import of these ancient art forms, their brushes and hand-ground ink, paper and silk, both widely used in China centuries before the West had them. Bringing these ancient arts practised by China's elite intelligentsia into the modern world of commercial marketing and open trading was a gamble, but Hugh had the passion and the courage to take it on, and in time his venture paid off. A new page was turned in the annals of Chinese art history. He may well have been the first art dealer to mix ethnicities and cultures in such a radical manner. And now, half a century later, it is no longer uncommon to see artists of distant cultures exhibiting in our popular international galleries. Like pearl divers brought up by generations of deep-sea divers, their lungs developed beyond the capacity of others, Hugh grew up with a wider scope of visual and tactile experience that enabled him to feel at home in any new sphere he wished to explore.

And so came the great adventure into new realms of the soul. In Bangkok, he once told me, he liked to go boating on the *khlongs* (canals) leading from the city out towards the sea. And on one memorable day in March 1983, he unexpectedly saw the invisible, experienced the unthinkable, knew the unknowable and understood the universe and its myriad realms and

conditions. His upbringing allowed him to recognise this experience as a union with the Dao rather than as one defined by the limitations of prejudice, religious or secular.

And so we parted ways, both happy and satisfied. I was happy for the artists whose lives I'd had a small hand in adjusting, not without a bit of drama. And Hugh, having found something in his life that opened to him unimagined vistas and possibilities, was happy beyond description. He had entered the inner world of the infinite, exponentially different from anything he had known by seeing or touching. And this opening was all-absorbing and all-consuming.

His understanding of self now began to change in profound ways, as the new enlightened self became integrated with the ineffable power of metaphysical consciousness. This consciousness was not perishable, temporary, measurable, visible or controllable, but it was there, and this was his true self – observing, being, watching the busyness and myriad concerns of ordinary human life with detachment, gazing beyond trivial distraction into a greater world breathing beyond visibility.

In the late twentieth century, intelligentsia the world over were reading books on freeing the mind, on transcending the confines of daily routine, wishing to break through the old cultures of East and West that for millennia had muffled their societies under beliefs and political agendas, and the thoughtful truth-seekers were hard at work searching for fresh air that breathed with life. From various types of meditation practices to drugs and medicines, humans, especially from the western world, sought ways to escape the oppression of values they no longer cherished, and the outworn social norms of centuries that now felt too tight, too restrictive and no longer viable.

Now unshackled, Hugh strove heartily to share his new insight with the world. He reviewed the idea of art and its functionality as well as our responses to art stimuli, writing book after book trying to explain the inexplicable. And joining the artists he admired, Hugh began to show his paintings, following their modernist, phantasmagorical realism that turned trees into stones and rocks into habitats of imaginary beings and daemons.

It is at this point in his interesting life that Hugh Moss has joined the more avant-garde Chinese artists in speaking their rarefied brush language, whilst expressing his own unique world-spanning consciousness. He paraphrases the deep love of strange rocks that the Chinese love to put on display stands, indoors or outdoors, and lets his original and intensely coloured rocks perch on openwork, vine-crafted stands, following the Manchu

court's eighteenth-century attachment to the rococo. Here and there in these stands, Hugh has camouflaged a lupine muzzle, half-open and ready to pounce. Strange faces emerge in staves and stones, thrust forward in the crest of a wave or at the tip of a branch, haunting and barely revealed. Hugh paints beloved convoluted rock forms strangely frozen mid-dance with their telltale Taihu Lake holes boring across temporal dimensions. There are also ancient trees that twist through eternity, as well as the obligatory literati component of poetry written in well-practised calligraphy.

In three vertical scrolls of islands, he shows expertise in three-dimensional rendering, suspending the delectable glowing Swiss-cheese-like yellow islands above an aquamarine sea, both filled with pits and holes. We read them easily as islands over an ocean, so deeply accustomed are we to reading colour as substance. In the English calligraphy, something more than half a millennium distant is imported as a fresh breeze in Anglophone timespace, reinforcing the oneness of our global village, new yet warmly familiar in unfamiliar environments and curiously intimate. Why not? Is it not like enlarging our palate by including tastes from the farthest corners of the world? And what could be more delightful? In all creation we are one, and have always been, and yet we like to ignore our own truth and pretend always to be in hopelessly uncomfortable situations. But those who experience the ubiquitous and inalienable heavenly unity have been working hard to spread this unified and unifying heartset in any and all ways they can. And they find the most effective conduits in walking, in food, in music. And in art. Thank you, Hugh.

Joan Stanley-Baker, 2025

IN A GOURD OF PLUM WINE

Peter Suart

THE ARTIST FIRST met him when the master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat was a book, and only the spine of a book, at that. Such a meeting would not be remarkable were it not that the spine was spotted in an immense library of ten thousand spines, which gives one pause. On it were Chinese characters and the marks of splashed ink. The taking of the book from the shelf was the opening of immense stone doors, which, weightless, made no sound. Beyond them lay a vast transparent turquoise space, as if underwater. In it were crags and gorges, pines and stones, and a *simurgh* high in the sky.

Further in was a hut sheltered by trees in the lee of a hill, with a tumbling stream passing the door, which was open. Without looking up, the old man at the painting table held out the brush and disappeared into the floor, returning with plum wine in a gourd. Much of the ink succeeded in missing the paper entirely, and in the end the plum wine was found to serve in its stead.

Just when the artist thought he could stand no more, he turned to find the old man gone. And the hut. And the vast transparent turquoise space. Even the library had disappeared. The only things left were art and memory.

At the Siege Perilous as the great winds stir in the summer of 2025.



The light he feels
of the world is actually
by show and rain have
their way into the fabric
of the world for the shimmering
dissolving it with a stillness
indulgent to find or to rain
Nature as sculpture among
sculpt with the clay of rain
Perfect Sago seeds that
could form the clanking
urban bustle of purport
and the quiet birth
of a body or in the quiet of
the single wither and
take or giving of a part
Nature to sculpture to
stone to be portals
to other worlds between
or internal I found it
ink and water the brush
held it held for the point
the ink as the pen and the
of water the water still
reaches into the world



Inscribed in the
middle of the page
and also at the
bottom of the
page. The ink is
of the same color
as the water and
the brush is the
same as the water



TRANSCULTURALIST MANIFESTO

THE LONG-TERM INEVITABILITY of globalisation, and the concomitant increased sophistication of theoretical understanding, will make the future of whatever we include in the domain of art transcultural. All local socio-cultural or nationalistic art-historical concerns will be transcended by a global creativity that will be free to find inspiration – material, psychological or aesthetic – from any and all cultures, past or present, in order to evolve. Ideally it will do so free of all existing value prejudices, and will be free to appropriate whatever is deemed worthy of attention without opprobrium.

Transculturalism finds an appropriate analogy in water, which falls and streams to form rivers, each with a name and topography, arriving finally at this or that sea or ocean and becoming one indivisible body of water, albeit one we name in parts. Evaporation perpetuates the cycle.

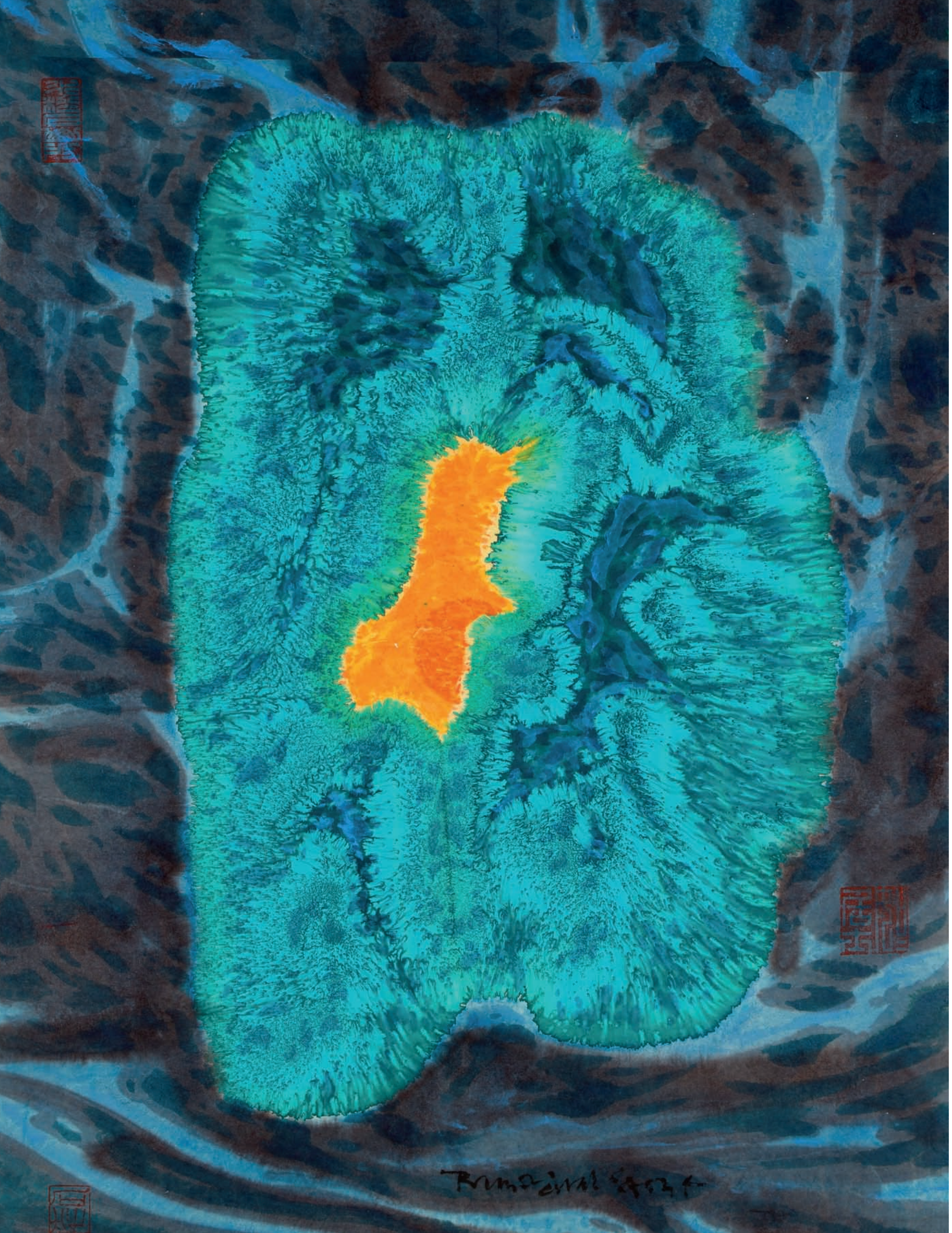
In this analogy, transculturalism is the world ocean, an indivisible creativity whose individual sources are irrelevant to the future, being nothing more than a matter of cultural history. The water cycle represents both the confluence of local cultural creative response into transcultural creative response, and the evolution of transcultural creativity itself.

Transculturalism is an overarching perspective that allows prejudice-free creative focus on any lower-level concerns, even prejudice. It has no rules that govern it, only those that arise out of it.



PAINTING THE DAO

Theory



Trinité 1913



ART AND CONSCIOUSNESS

WE TEND TO SEE ART as an endeavour separate from other domains, but I find it more useful to see it as the inevitable outcome of creativity, a deep human response to a fundamental universal force. While nature, with timeless indifference, just gets on with energy-fuelled creation, self-conscious humanity has the capacity to respond *knowingly*. Self-consciousness evolved with the capacity to separate self from environment and consider each independently. With that enormous leap creativity became an extremely powerful force, a watershed moment in the evolution of consciousness. We became *Homo narrans* and began creating numerous languages – the tools of self-consciousness – through which to tell our stories, to ourselves and to others. We gained the intellect, the reasoning faculties of mind, as a creative tool and began the long struggle out of primordial harmony into intellectual disharmony. There was no alternative, and for hundreds of thousands of years angst and confusion – Edvard Munch's endless scream – accompanied intellect, for with awareness of self came knowledge of its isolation and fragility.

With intellect came interpretation, and the capacity to interpret gave rise to argument and conflict, which, combined with an inevitable focus on the separate self and its ego twin, heralded a disharmonious age that could not be avoided. It was inevitable that we first separated the self in order to understand it and its environment, and then became able to forge the tools to transcend that self. Evidence of individual transcendence permeates history transculturally; it is the source of philosophical convictions that do not have gods or God as a *governing* force, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism, where a higher *state* of being is supreme rather than a higher being.¹ Deities arose out of lower-level religious structures seeking to explain the mystery to the mystified. Transcendence has not yet achieved sufficient global respect to bring about the next watershed moment in consciousness

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and begin the aspirational and benign age of reacquired harmony, a chief obstacle being that the egoic self is inherently disinclined to entertain the necessary prerequisite for transcendence of rising above self-interest as a governing perspective.

The rate of evolution is exponential. It took about ten billion years for the simplest life forms to appear, but only a further three billion for today's extraordinary complexity of mind and its means of communication to evolve. The pace of technological development also accelerates, as each invention or discovery opens onto many others. To send a message from London to Beijing and receive a reply once took a year; today such communication is almost instantaneous.

There are two problems with such acceleration of means. The first is that each watershed moment creates problems for conventional wisdom, particularly for entrenched intellect. The second is that we find it increasingly difficult to keep up with the meaning being explored by our accelerating means. Computing has become so advanced over the past decade that we now flirt with Artificial Intelligence to help us keep up. Any rapid leap forward in our means of communication is initially and inevitably accompanied by angst and confusion.

The art world is no different. Religion and science may be non-overlapping magisteria in our search for meaning, but art – in our definition 'any creative response to experience' – overlaps with everything. That is why it is so important to us: in a world of turbulence, uncertainty and now existential danger, salvation rests entirely on our creativity.

I set out to define an overarching theory of art that would work for any culture at any time, and found that the perspective of the resulting theory was applicable to our other main vehicles of evolving consciousness: religion, philosophy and science. In the course of this work I came to the conclusion that the modern western revolution in the arts had been globally misunderstood. Caught up in the excitement of the revolution, we lost sight of its purpose and of its fundamental achievements. It was also obvious that the tenets of that revolution, exported on the wings of hegemony before we even began to understand them clearly ourselves, were both confusing and largely meaningless when applied to Chinese aesthetics. If we are to harness creativity in the face of existential threat, we must understand it clearly, and I don't believe we do.²

In the West, creative artists responded to the new horizons of fully emancipated aesthetics faster than art theorists, who focused on the isms and failed to recognise their underlying achievement. A revolution is against

some perceived tyranny, but the surface excitement of the isms diverted attention from identifying their fundamental purpose and meaning. A revolution must either succeed or fail; perpetual revolution is an oxymoron, which can only, ironically, lead to a revolution against perpetual revolution. The heat of the modern western art revolution was so intense that we lost sight of what it was all about, and therefore whether it had been achieved, and if so, when.

As I tried to reconcile the aesthetics of the two cultures, I gradually came to the conclusion that what took place in the West had, essentially, taken place in China thousands of years ago. So the impact of the western revolution should have been seen as regional, the overthrow of tyranny in the western aesthetic domain. Its impact, however, was global and widely misunderstood, leading to the present confusion in the art world.

Any radical change in theory, in any domain, tends to require the re-evaluation of cultural prejudices. The West's modernism – a word and idea that was wildly inadequate and utterly confusing when applied to Chinese art – was exported globally as if it was the necessary foundation upon which all future art would rest. That assumption was wrong, however unpalatable such a judgement may be for the art world. The excitement of the surface of art seemed revolutionary, but even that was misleading. We made the mistake of taking thousands of years of reliance upon art's subject matter and immediate message, the surface of the art object, as still governing the new art. That was also wrong. The great achievement of the revolution was the shift from object aesthetics to process aesthetics.

Given my interest in two conflicting cultural perspectives, it was inevitable that my new theory would be transcultural, capable of being applied to the art of any culture at any time, and given the underlying purpose of creativity, it was necessary that it be not just a theory of art but a theory of art and consciousness.³ The traditional western understanding of art was as a separate domain, its function being to create art objects. Artistic vision was transformed through acquired skill into a finished work of art, its purpose largely being propaganda for religious or philosophical ideas. In China the surface had long been incidental to the overall process of art. The result of all creativity in an aesthetically mature culture isn't an art object or performance, it is the evolution of consciousness, a view which shifts the emphasis from art object to the entire process of expanding consciousness through art, which includes the audience and its creative input.

For millennia in the West we got along very well with an object theory of art focused on surface meaning. The question 'Is this a work of art or not?'

worked adequately as a first step in approaching creativity, but it doesn't work in fully mature aesthetic cultures, and hasn't in China for more than two millennia. In process aesthetics we ask, 'Does my involvement with this act of creative communication deepen my understanding?' This shift resolves all the outstanding questions that linger in the art world.

A single example is all we need: consider Duchamp's reoriented urinal of 1917. Widely dismissed as art for the better part of a century, it became recognised as one of the seminal artistic contributions of the revolution. Eventually we realised that the object itself was unimportant, other than for its shock value in gaining attention. The importance lay in the meaning of such an object; the object was the messenger, not the message. Once the message is understood, we don't need to entertain the messenger. *Fountain* was comprehensively dismissed and nobody bothered to keep the original, not even Duchamp, who knew what it meant and that once the meaning was grasped the object became irrelevant. By establishing the primacy of the process of art over its objects, Duchamp was in the vanguard of realising the emancipation of creativity. That shift in understanding allows us to make sense of other widely misunderstood acts of creativity – a pile of bricks in the Tate Gallery, silent music, a shark in formaldehyde, Tracey's bed, wrapped buildings, Banksy's art-shredder, you name it.⁴ Whether the art object is considered art or not becomes meaningless because that is no longer where the *definition* of art rests; it rests in the overall process. Far beyond the production of art objects, art in the broader sense of 'any creative response to experience' becomes a metalanguage in the evolution of consciousness. Its fruits are self-realisation and evolved consciousness, which, by extension to the collective, become civilisation.

Another way of looking at this is that in the West art was a window on reality, whereas in China it was a window on the self. This difference in focus – the world outside and the world inside, both aspects of reality – indicates the fundamental and dichotomous purposes of art in the two cultures as they existed prior to the modern western revolution, since when western art has been emancipated and the rules that once governed have been discarded, though they linger still to our confusion. In the visual arts, ism by ism, we were left only with such rules as arose out of art. After thousands of years of servitude, western artists behaved like kids set loose in a sweet shop without walls and with infinite horizons. However, their inability to understand what they were really up to as revolutionaries led to an equal inability to judge when they had achieved their goal, leading to revolution's *negative* legacy. The necessary novelty of revolution, replacing

the old with the new, was transformed into a widespread and no longer pertinent search for surface novelty at all costs, resulting in widespread banality. Those still shouting slogans and waving banners in the rubble of a revolution already won become not only irrelevant but tiresome. Confusion crept into the art world for both artists and audience, and was not confined to the West.

China, having recognised the overarching role of art as a metalanguage more than two thousand years ago, was aesthetically far ahead of the West but augmented the confusion by crediting the western export.⁵ For more than a century in China there has been a debate about the relevance of its art at a time of accelerating globalisation. The fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the tumultuous years of the Republic prompted reformers in China to look to the West to reconsider their politics, educational systems and technology, in the wake of national humiliation since the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century. Aesthetics had always played an important role in Chinese culture, so art was also called into question as cultural self-doubt coincided with growing knowledge of modern western art and the West's military might. China made the fundamental mistake of assuming that it also had to play catch-up aesthetically, and it set about modernising what had been effectively modern for millennia, leading inevitably to confusion.

Weasel words borrowed from the West further confused matters. The word 'modern' created a dichotomy with 'traditional', implying that China's traditions were aesthetically outdated and irrelevant.⁶ 'Abstract' was another. Abstraction in China was firmly established more than a thousand years ago, but without the need to eschew depiction. For the Chinese to discard subject matter in order to explore abstraction would have seemed as silly as deciding which leg to walk on. The abstract languages of visual art – form, line, colour and texture – are perfectly capable of functioning and being appreciated within depiction. The surface abstraction of the modern West had in China long been a more subtle abstraction.⁷

Chinese artists also saw no need to keep introducing new subject matter to the visual arts; novelty of surface was incidental to the overriding purpose of creativity. The natural world became a self-sufficient subject for exploring the meaning of nature and self as a unified exercise. The majestic landscape painting of the tenth century – masterpieces depicting the grandeur of nature as a microcosm of the Dao, the source of nature and the creative universe – began to turn inward by the twelfth century, a development foreshadowed long before. A well-known eighth-century summation of it came

from the eccentric artist Zhang Zao: 'Outwardly, we take creation [nature] as our model, but inwardly we seek the wellspring of the heart.' Landscape became a vehicle for exploring and expressing the self, an infinite resource, eternally contemporary. The question 'Is ink landscape painting traditional or modern?' became meaningless; it is both, and remains as relevant today as it ever was. We find a parallel to this in alchemy in China, which shifted centuries ago from a focus on the transformation of substances in the search for elixirs of immortality to the transformation of the self, through *neidan*, inner alchemy.

For over a thousand years the ink-painting tradition of China has been the epitome of painting inner meaning, essence, the subtle patterns and energies of nature; of painting the Dao. Not the *path* towards it, nor the lower-level religious structures that arose out of it, nor the surface imagery of Daoist symbolism and patriarchs. The goal was always the transcendent, ineffable Dao itself.

Creativity keeps one alive beyond expectation, vital beyond reason. It functions as social grease and is infinitely entertaining with its daily adventure into as yet undiscovered realms. The role of creative personality is to constantly make the universe anew, and by doing so to transform it, one person at a time, starting with the self. In that respect artists are as gods, but without the burden of responsibility.

Creativity is in the business of transformation. Its task is to enlighten, ultimately so in attaining the full bandwidth of consciousness through the paradigm-changing transcendent enlightenment experience itself. I came to recognise all of this when it unexpectedly, and delightfully, happened to me on the *khlongs* of Bangkok in 1983, providing the missing piece of my theoretical jigsaw puzzle.

Notes

¹ Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* is a recent western form of the same idea, but as a rule earlier western approaches to the authentic mysticism involved (as opposed to its occult reflections) have been subverted by socio-cultural belief in anthropomorphised deities. My forthcoming book *Driven Sane* deals with these ideas in greater depth.

² This also goes for any other domain where there remains a conflict between interpretations. We now know that the earth is not flat, that the universe is not terracentric, and that the earth is a minor planet at the edge of one of billions upon billions of galaxies, so conflicts that arose out of earlier false beliefs have evaporated. But cosmology, along with other aspects of the scientific domain, still rests on conflicting opinion and is not yet entirely free of dissent, just a great deal more free, and less dangerously so, than the domain of religion, or even the political application of philosophy.

³ Its most recent iteration was published as *Art Reboot: A transcultural re-evaluation of the nature and purpose of art that finds in China's ancient past the resolution of global confusion in the modern art world* (Hong Kong: OM Publishing, 2023), a rewrite of the earlier volume, *The Art of Understanding Art: A New Perspective* (London: Profile Books, 2015). I also publish, free to view, a growing number of essays on art and consciousness on my website transculturalink.com.

⁴ As I edit this, it occurs to me that there is an extraordinary correlation between Banksy's response to his own art and the ancient Chinese ink-painting tradition. Any owner of a painting with sufficient confidence as an aesthetic contributor felt free to add to the original a response in elegant graffiti, possibly on the mount, or on additional paper added to the end of a handscroll. Collectors also regularly added their seals directly onto the original painting, resulting in major early works with a blizzard of vermilion affirmations of appreciation. The conventional western mind finds this vandalistic, because the object is sacrosanct rather than the process. With the process sacrosanct, any addition has positive potential to evolve consciousness. The original work of art may be altered, but for a higher purpose. I have no idea what Banksy had in mind when he came up with the remarkably creative concept, but it transformed a repetitive, albeit significant, image into a unique work of communication. It also doubled its market value at the press of a remote control. That would certainly have tickled his well-demonstrated contempt for the conventional, materialistic focus of the art world. I issue an open invitation to Banksy to contact me. He's welcome to pop round to the studio wearing a balaclava and hazmat suit. I'll still tell him to come back later if I happen to be busy writing an encomium on a fourteenth-century handscroll by Ni Zan.

⁵ Hardly surprisingly, given that for the first half of the twentieth century revolution was a way of life towards a future utopia – as so often, more realisable in theory than in practice. External revolution can never bring about utopia, though internal revolution might eventually achieve it.

⁶ In the twentieth century in the West, while the *Mona Lisa* was revered, and was probably the most valuable art object in the world, it was still irrelevant in terms of its aesthetic focus. To make it relevant, modern artists had to add a moustache! Ah, Marcel Duchamp again; where would we be without him?

⁷ There are several records of artists producing similar works to the abstract expressionists more than a thousand years ago in China, but they were the exception rather than the rule, as the urge to such surface abstraction was already satisfied by abstraction within depiction.



PAINTING THE DAO

Practice

Inscribed by the Master of Hot Water Paint and Seal
Rth 4th at the Garden at the Edge of the World
beginning in the form of a mountain for the first time
with clouds and dragons in the early spring of 2029



LEARNING TO PAINT

I FIRST BECAME interested in the Chinese ink-painting tradition to make good use of the copious wall space in my newly-acquired Mayfair gallery in 1970. I focused on living artists and exhibited and agented for some of the most important expatriate painters, none of whom had a global agent at that time. Learning directly from them deepened my understanding of Chinese painting. One of the artists I came to act for was CC Wang (Wang Jiqian, 1907–2003), whom I already knew as a collector of Chinese art and a client. It was his theoretical grasp and ability to explain that first led me to question western art theories of Chinese painting, but it wasn't until I moved to Hong Kong in 1975 and expanded the group of artists for whom I acted that I entertained the possibility of accelerating the process of learning through painting myself. Visiting New York in 1980, I asked CC Wang how I should go about learning. 'Paint,' he replied.

From the theoretical input of my artist friends I quickly understood that creativity was what art was all about and that it was necessary, whether as artist or audience, to climb the ladder from the easily accessible towards ever more esoteric meaning. I also realised that I already had a great deal of valuable training: for nearly three decades I had been collecting, studying and becoming deeply involved in Chinese art, including painting and calligraphy.

One of my early passions was strange stones. These natural or naturalistic sculptures, for garden, home or studio, had become as treasured as landscape painting by the aesthetic elite by the Song dynasty (979–1280). I had become familiar with them through paintings, where they often appear in garden or interior scenes. They were typically Daoist, both in their elevation from the natural world to human aesthetics and in their nature as portals or meditational aids granting access to a transcendent reality – the Dao. The culture abounds with stories of individuals crossing the boundary

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between the world of red dust and its transcendent counterpart. Whether this meditational transformation is achieved through a strange stone, a blossom-covered cave entrance or a landscape painting is only a difference in means, not meaning. I became accustomed to finding myself lost in landscape paintings and strange stones, and understood the meditative calm of transcending the intellect in a temporary but timeless experience, like a music listener who for a few brief moments becomes the music, without distinction between self and environment.⁸

It is easy enough to learn how to paint if you have a driving reason to do so. If you want to become proficient in painting hares, with a few field trips, a camera or sketch pad, some internet searches and exploration of how other artists have painted them, you will rapidly be able to paint them convincingly. Maybe not as well as Dürer, but with no rules in play, you don't need to paint like anyone else; just paint a hare the way you paint a hare. Therein lies a fundamental key to painting as a creative activity: the audience isn't in search of a mimetic image of a hare; it knows what they look like. The audience is looking to be intrigued by the artist's interpretation of the essence of hare.

Learning to paint by starting with years of rigorous technical training before being let loose in the fields of expression has worked for millennia, but it relies on distinctions and rules: distinctions between what you are and what you should be as an artist, and rules as to how to go about unifying the two. Many fall along the way, exhausted or disillusioned or bored. But reverse the process and be an artist first, and then learn what you need to, and it is easier and far more fun. You will end up creating your own visionary images without the fear of failure and disillusionment. If you are not afraid to fail for a while, you will quickly learn to succeed just by enjoying the process. In process aesthetics the product is de-emphasised, so that if you've had fun making it, even if it ends up in the bin you have fulfilled the function of art as process. You don't even need to paint anything specific at first; just enjoy the languages of form, line, colour and texture. It is very difficult to spend time having as much fun as uninhibited painting provides without beginning to produce something you begin to find meaningful. But keep in mind that what is meaningful for you may not be so for others, and vice versa. No rules. What matters is authenticity, at every level of the process.⁹

Through my artist friends I soon came to recognise the importance of the theoretical foundations of creativity, and by the time I settled in Hong Kong I was well on the way to a theory of art and consciousness, although it took several decades to refine.

The outcome of all of this was the realisation that 'essence' was what it was all about, not only in art but in refining consciousness, and that creative response to experience was *the* crucial metalanguage involved. Essence is the foundation stone of vision, authenticity and all other aspects of painting and comprehension, an insight which follows the recognition that they are all faces of a single quest. Which brings us to the question of what the essence of art and the ink-painting tradition is.

ESSENCE

Once aesthetic focus shifts from object to process, the search for essence becomes a matter of refining our interpretations of meaning conveyed by the art object as messenger rather than message. Once we recognise an image of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus as propaganda for a Christian interpretation of meaning, we can move beyond that to the art that underlies the surface meaning. Local interpretation of the surface message gives way to the inner meaning of the creative process.

Different perspectives give rise to interpretations of meaning, and those can be conflicting. Europe calls its eighteenth century the 'Enlightenment', a rational culture antithetical to the enlightenment of Chinese mysticism. One was based on an outward objective reality, the other, on inner subjective reality. This difference is reflected in how creativity in the arts evolved in West and East, and explains why traditional western art theory is inadequate to understand Chinese art at any depth.

For centuries before the modern revolution, the West primarily sought essence in art at its surface. Surface skill in expressing the western mindset was paramount. In China, on the other hand, essence was sought in the *inner* meaning of the process, which was a far more efficient approach to self-realisation. In short, until the modern revolution, the West used art as a means of pointing the self towards religious or philosophical paths towards self-realisation. In China art was seen, in its own right, as a direct and efficient vehicle of self-realisation. In the West art was a signpost to a circumscribed Enlightenment governed by monotheism, its ultimate purpose to enforce the culture's rules and supervision in order to fulfil evolving consciousness. In China art became a direct assault on such Enlightenment. In the twentieth century the two cultural mainstreams finally began to come into confluence, but global misunderstanding and confusion soon separated them again.

It is useful here to consider the three stages of enlightenment: aspiration, realisation and integration. The first stage is the intellectual understanding that enlightenment is both real and meaningfully transformational; both achievable and crucial for fulfilling the evolution of consciousness.

The second stage is the experience of enlightenment, of transcendence beyond the interpreting intellect. Its happening is beyond our control, but given aspiration there are many ways of encouraging it, including a variety of meditational means.

The third stage is what happens for the rest of a life as the enlightened integrate the two ways of knowing. With the full bandwidth of consciousness the enlightened return to the tools of the intellectual domain armed with a wondrous metaperspective. Finally, it boils down to grasping essence, but there are different interpretations of how to do so most efficiently.

In a fully mature aesthetic culture, the hierarchy of the arts arises out of, rather than governs, creativity. In China an activity's status as art was based solely on what best facilitated self-realisation. By the fifth century BCE the arts included archery, charioteering, writing, music and ritual, and across the first millennium, poetry (often as songs), calligraphy and painting also came to be recognised as art. The idea of the Three Perfections – poetry, calligraphy and painting – arose naturally as a syncretic approach to three integrated art forms serving one ultimate purpose. Tap-dancing on an upturned bucket could qualify as art if the aesthetic elite decided it expressed essence of wisdom. It mattered less *what* was being done than *how* it was being done, which, of course, also concerned *who* was doing it. If a child says the moon is made of green cheese, we laugh; if a revered sage says it, we ponder underlying profundity.

AUTHENTICITY

If enlightenment is the ultimate goal of self-conscious creativity, what are the means of perceiving and expressing it? One all-encompassing answer is authenticity, at the level of process rather than of product. That seemingly small shift in focus has the capacity to change everything; authenticity takes on a more far-reaching remit. The authenticity of an art object is a simple binary issue – authentic or fake – even if we have insufficient data to determine its status, but there are far more subtle levels of authenticity which are an important part of determining our other fundamental issue of creativity: essence.

Vision in art is the capacity of the creative personality to see what others cannot; to see phenomenal and psychological realms not only at the conventional level, but at a tangent to them. The creative personality has authentic conviction that it matters, and authentic commitment to express it. In any aesthetic communication creative personality interprets the mysterious essence of existence in order to plumb its depths of meaning. In any field of endeavour only a small fraction of those involved are significant innovators who become respected leaders. In a fully mature aesthetic culture respect for its most creative members parallels that for shamans, prophets and other intermediaries in cultures governed by religion.

The artist must first have authenticity of purpose. There is a major difference between efficiently reaching for the ultimate goal of art and simply producing propaganda for lower-level concerns. The most efficient route to the power of high art is to have authentic purpose to begin with.

Then there is vision. Visionary artists are marked by their ability to reach beyond looking at surface levels of reality to *seeing*. Recognising the inner patterns of nature, invisible to casual attention, is paramount. The great value of our artists has always been to see beyond normal perception.¹⁰

Once I began to take painting seriously I found myself seeing the world differently. I once looked at trees in broad categories: ancient, gnarled, beautiful, convoluted. I was intrigued up to a point, but bounced off the surface of reality. Now I see the inner patterns of trees in order to paint them as they are beneath the surface. It is a cliché, but in order to paint their essence one *becomes* trees psychologically and the only way to do that is to commune with them so deeply that the distinction between trees and self dissolves. Free of intellectual constraints and the barrier between perception and interpretation, the artist becomes creator as much as recorder.

Process aesthetics leads to syncretism of mind, bypassing the barrier between artist and audience, so that the artist's first audience is the self. Artists who don't intrigue themselves are less likely to intrigue an audience. If an artist is merely repeating the vision of others, whether acknowledged or not, that will reduce visionary and expressive weight. Borrowed vision may retain some level of its originality in interpretation but be diminished in meaning. In a fully mature culture an inauthentic art object can carry some level of relative authenticity in its process. We see this in the ink-painting tradition of China,¹¹ where the focus shifted from the art object's surface meaning to its inner meaning, from the messenger to the message, making it possible for authentic meaning to be conveyed through an inauthentic messenger.

On the other side of the art object the audience refines authenticity as its understanding contributes creatively to the process. The baton is passed, but the end-product of art remains: artist and audience share a creative search for meaning. In the knowing audience this is how art works most efficiently as a metalanguage for self-realisation. The creativity of the audience, endlessly into the future, accesses and interprets the vision of the artist, and thereby enhances comprehension, whether incrementally or as a complete transformation of consciousness.

BREADTH AND DEPTH

Traditional Chinese ink paintings of landscapes with tiny figures and the occasional small dwelling can seem boringly similar at the surface. But the knowing audience, steeped in the tradition and seeing past the surface, sees each as excitingly different in the languages of brushwork, form and abstraction. Knowing *how* to access inner meaning makes all the difference to aesthetic response. I have a seal among the more than one hundred I use on my own paintings that says, 'Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man'. The message is clear: artists may grind ink to create, but the act of creativity also 'grinds' the artist on the inkstone of experience. The audience then metaphorically grinds its own ink to interpret meaning and refine perception and inner character to match the process of the artist.

The neophyte can approach the works of Ni Zan, one of the most famous of fourteenth-century artists, and find pretty much the same painting over and over again, with very little 'going on' as subject matter, and certainly no obvious novelty. Yet his brushwork is such that the greatest of later artists stand in awe of it, recognising in it not only pure essence in the ink-painting tradition, but essence of the artist's character and vision. CC Wang, steeped in his own literati tradition, bowed metaphorically to his supreme brushwork until the day he died. He summed up the nature of essence succinctly:

To understand Chinese painting is not a simple matter. There is *guangdu*, complexity or breadth, and *shendu*, depth – these are two aspects in the appreciation of Chinese painting. Breadth includes the pictorial topic, the artist's [surface] message. Depth refers to the inner spirit of the work and the personality of brushwork. The artist may prefer one aspect or the other. That is his choice. The viewer has the same option. It is

inexcusable to confuse these two areas and use one to attack or belittle the other.¹²

Through the lens of CC's distinction we can see one of the negative legacies of the modern western revolution: surface results (breadth) delivered a circus of novelty, a dizzying succession of innovation that we took to be the essential nature of the future of art. This led directly to a vast quantity of surface banality, which is not a problem in itself; any creative response has its value and will find a matching and useful level of audience response, leading both artist and audience to the next rung of the ladder of meaning. Banality has its place, but we can climb the ladder faster with a clearer understanding of what it all means and of the purpose of the ladder itself. It is wise to focus on depth rather than breadth in any aspect of evolving consciousness. Essence in creativity resides far beneath the surface, but once accessed it transforms the efficiency of art as a metalanguage. In the Daoist interpretation the ultimate search for essence leads to the Gates of Wonder, through which the self is united with the Absolute.¹³

MEDIA AND FORMATS

In China the purpose of creativity led to sophisticated media in the arts. The ink-painting tradition developed tools and formats ideally suited to the ultimate goal of creativity; they were *partners* in the dance, not merely its venue, culminating in paper that was thin, absorbent and responsive, aiding the overcoming of intention and the exploration of invention. *Xuan* paper was developed more than a thousand years ago, hand-wrought from the bark of sandalwood and rice straw to make thin sheets. Paper, water-based black ink and the flexible and fine-tipped bamboo brush are the simplest of means, used to record household accounts and to fly the artist into transcending the medium and the process itself.

Then there are the formats. The idea of the Three Perfections – poetry, calligraphy and painting – came through the recognition that the separation of art modes was a lower-level mist of an idea that evaporated with the shift to process aesthetics. The same applies to the lower-level distinction between artist and audience in the handscroll format. The viewer unrolls the painting bit by bit to view it, and is drawn into the process more efficiently than when bouncing off a painting hanging in a fixed position and in danger of becoming unnoticed. The paintings hung permanently in

our homes require that we change our guests to make the art seen: 'Wow! Is that a Picasso?'

Our initial impulse as viewer is to roll through the whole scroll to see what *happens*. Having done that, if it intrigues as art, we roll back and forth, viewing shorter or longer sections as fancy and the painting take us, in effect composing multiple pictures as viewer-artist, and paralleling the experience of cinema. Having seen *what* happens, we shift our attention to *how* it happens, to the languages of line, form, colour, texture, confidence and sagacity, and beyond to their ineffable union in transforming consciousness. Once the process lesson of the handscroll is understood, it can be applied to any other aspect of creative response to experience. It is a key that opens the doors of aesthetics.

BRUSH IN HAND

I use a transcultural range of papers, but a favourite of late is cloud-dragon paper made in Taiwan, a skin-thin cotton paper, absorbent and with tiny cotton threads pressed into the surface, mostly on one side, which I tend to think of as the 'back'. Western papers are generally opaque and the artist chooses a side and sticks to it; Chinese papers are generally translucent when wet and more flexible.

I make marks initially with fairly large brushes, the ancient, gnarled and weathered sages of the brush pot, part of studio ambience as well as being tools pressed regularly into service. I dip the brush in the water pot on the painting table, add pigments to the side and tip of the brush and make marks. That is when the control of the uncontrollable begins: dancing with the brush, turning it this way and that, pushing it into the paper to break up the brush-head, all without specific intention, though having done it so many times before there is always an element of intention in mind, just not one to which I cling. If one is painting the Dao, painting the nature of nature, *clinging* is antithetical, a negation of the Dao. If an intriguing possibility suggests itself, I follow it.

After turning the paper over to consider which side offers the greatest potential, usually the reverse of the side first marked, I add a second layer, often using a finer brush to draw out whatever appeared in the suggestive abstract marks. Occasionally I draw what I see in the marks with charcoal first. A friend once gave me a box of charcoal as a birthday present and I have been amazed to see how long the sticks have lasted, long beyond my

recollection of which friend gave them to me. This stage establishes the orientation and subject matter.

In the ink-painting tradition, grey shades of black ink are considered colours, and colour opens up potential for abstraction. Each layer has the two-fold task of augmenting the gradually establishing subject matter and shifting the focus to abstraction. When creating landscape elements, or anything else, layers of abstraction build from lighter and darker areas and virgin white paper,¹⁴ becoming a powerful formal language. In paintings where multiple layers of often subtle changes in colour are added, the result can be very complex.

Colours can carry subtle messages, like cinnabar red, which I use frequently. Cinnabar is an ore of mercury and is a basic compound in alchemical practice, which makes it appropriate for strange stones, though they are rarely red in the real world, the ore of cinnabar tending to be a formally unattractive lump. **AKI6.2I** is one of a series of works I painted of strange stones mounted on stands. I chose the colour of the stones for esoteric meaning and for unfettered aesthetic preference, and the stands became a calligraphic dance with the stones. Beyond the Stage of Time, the stones were not even constrained by gravity, and several of them leapt off or floated above their stands.

As I paint, ideas pass in and out of mind, theoretical musings and mind surfing as a meditational soundtrack to the brush. Possible titles and inscriptions surface during this process but are never recorded in writing as I go, since if I forget whatever it was that seemed important, it wasn't. Recording is antithetical to serious mind surfing, although, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, 'Mind surfing is far too important to be taken seriously', as are all forms of creativity.

Because I approach painting as process, each painting becomes a 'forever painting': unconstrained by an anticipated result or the amount of time it might take to produce it, I approach each painting as if it might take the rest of my life to complete. One of these days I shall be right, but in the meantime painting is the equivalent of adventure tourism: boots on, ready to go, no idea what awaits but confident of excitement and the chance to discover new realms of existence and meaning.

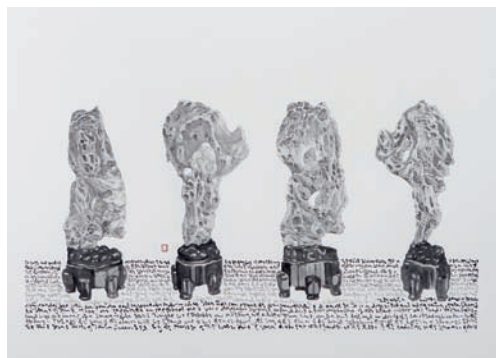
Every layer augments the process, lifts the excitement a notch or two, and each must acknowledge existing layers. But as they accumulate, even as they coalesce into ever more definite surface subject matter, the focus is increasingly on joining the gathering energy, on abstraction. It is a balance in which the subject matter is de-emphasised to the point of becoming



AKI6.2I
Dreams Arcane
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
mounted on *xuan* paper
250 × 124 cm, Hong Kong, 2016



AK9.16
*The Empty-headed Hermit's Ruyi Sceptre –
 Two Views in Sepia (one part)*
 92 x 95 cm, Hong Kong, 2009
 Private collection



AK12.46
The Five Stone Fools of Taihu
 55.8 x 76.8 cm, Hong Kong, 2012
 (detail below)



incidental to the dance itself, allowing the inner patterns of reality to take the lead. In this transformation everything changes, including, however incrementally, *me*. Paradoxically, the more the surface subject matter comes together, the more abstract it is. Paradox is found on the cusp between one level of consciousness and the next, until we transcend the realm of definition, including that of paradox.

Fully involved in the ultimate role of creativity, I paint the Dao. In Daoism it is understood that the Dao that can be explained is not the Dao, but it is *not* difficult to express beyond verbal language. That is the theoretical foundation of my understanding of creativity and art.

Painting esoteric objects as a mimetic exercise was an early impulse which didn't last long. I soon found that I could do it, which surprised but didn't delight me for long.¹⁵ **AK9.16**

I enjoyed the process of discovering that I could do it, but it seemed a little constrained; more like a repetitive craft than art. It was far more fun to start with an object, real or imaginary, and allow each painting to evolve naturally. This led to strange stones coming to life full of other-worldly creatures, energy and colours. I acquired a lovely Taihu stone from a fellow collector of esoteric Chinese art, which I gave to my daughter, also a creative aesthete, and painted her four views of it on Italian paper. I came to realise that painting what I see is far less exciting than seeing what I paint.¹⁶ **AK12.46**

I have an enduring interest in scholar's objects and literati trappings and they began turning up in the paintings. Then I began to invent objects, which was still more liberating. I was painting beyond the Stage of Time and its rules. The fetters of the dusty world were broken and I could collect scholarly works of art or invent them afresh, becoming the tradition I had delved into and reflected for so long, an utterly absorbing process.

One of my collecting passions arose out of my regular visits to Paris in the 1960s and early 70s. A dealer on the Left Bank, Gerard Levy, also enjoyed scholarly works of art, and in his small shop, in a corner behind his desk, was a spectacular walking staff. It is impossible to see endless Chinese paintings without seeing such staves in the hands of the elite. They were ubiquitous in paintings but, as I quickly discovered, very rare as aesthetic objects to collect. The majority of those depicted never existed, of course, and many in real life would have been functional – a segment of vine, a length of bamboo – and would not have been valued as works of art. I have been collecting them for more than half a century and still have very few I would admit to owning. By far the finest is the one I lusted after in Paris as a young man. Time after time, Gerard refused to sell it to me, despite my

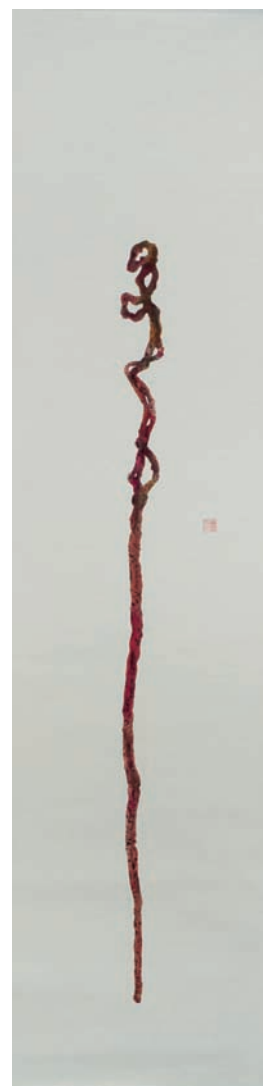
persistence; it was in his private collection. After at least a decade of this, I walked into his shop and he told me his daughter was getting married and if I paid for the wedding he would give me the staff. I obliged.

Despite the obvious and millennial association of walking staves with the elite, no connoisseurship existed, though they were occasionally mentioned in poems: 'Walking staff in hand . . .' Everything else that intrigued the elite attracted complex connoisseurship and interpretation, but not walking staves. So I set about inventing staff connoisseurship: taxonomy, categories, history. A summation of that connoisseurship then prompted the largest series of paintings of staves I ever embarked upon, two of the most ambitious with multiple panels of staves and texts. The first, in ink, included the invented history; the second, consisting of nineteen sheets of paper with ten staves in cinnabar red interspersed with text, was first exhibited at the Quintai Art Museum in 2024 in my first one-man museum show. **AKI4.75**

Apart from strange stones and their natural or naturalistic wood equivalents, *ruyi* sceptres, incense burners, fly whisks and other scholar's objects became my focus. As an adjunct to my collecting, I painted literati trappings without the constraints of reality or French weddings.

I also began to unify western and Chinese media. I had used French Arches and Italian Fabriano Artistico paper, both rough and smooth surfaces, and came to realise that the effects achievable on Chinese papers could, through different means, also be realised on western papers. Very heavy Arches paper, 640 or 850 grams, is remarkably strong, so I could wash and scrub back layers of colour to create softer, unexpected marks. In **AKI8.12** the background consists of some ten layers of subtly different washes, selectively scrubbed back under running water to create the effect of shifting incense smoke. I also use a technique developed by CC Wang in which he crumpled a sheet of paper, dipped it in ink, printed with it and then integrated the accidental marks with brushwork and colour washes. But in this case, instead of adding colour to the crinkled paper, I used it to blot the still-wet colour on the surface of the paper to leave paler wrinkled marks ideal for landscape elements or clouds.

Liu Kuo-sung, a key contributor to breaking free of the brushwork orthodoxy of the ink-painting tradition without abandoning the tradition itself, invented his own paper as part of his revitalisation of the tradition. It has large threads on its surface that can be pulled out at various stages of painting to create a natural 'brushwork'. From time to time he sent me some of a new batch of paper to experiment with. From one batch I created a



AKI4.75
Jungle-born
One of a set of 19 hanging scrolls
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon
and *xuan* paper, each sheet 248 × 61 cm
Sussex and Hong Kong, 2014–15



AKI8.12
The Censer's Dream (image only)
Ink and watercolour on Arches paper
Sheet size 57 × 76 cm, Hong Kong, 2018
Nanshun shanfang Collection, Singapore

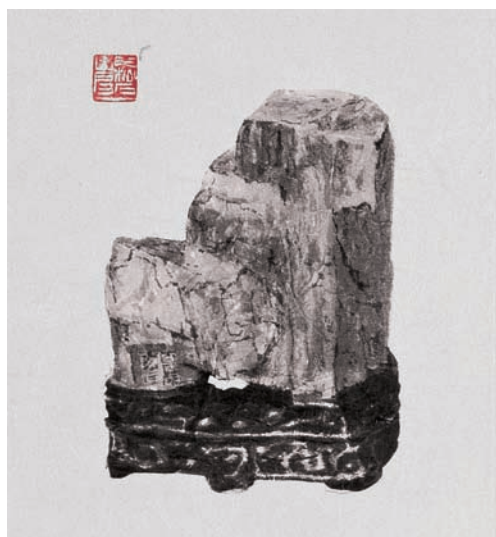
AKIO.98

Night and Day, National Pine Incense Burner, No.7
39 × 142 cm, Sussex, 2010



AKI8.1

Fleeing from Heaven
Ink and watercolour on Arches paper
57 × 76 cm, Hong Kong, 2018



AKIO.7

Red Cliff Stone (detail)
Ink and watercolour on cotton paper
94.0 × 19.4 cm, Hong Kong, 2010
Sotheby's, Hong Kong, 8 April 2010, lot 1714



AKI5.I30

The Seven Sages of the Strange Stone
Ink on Liu Kuo-sung paper mounted on *xuan* paper
145 × 257 cm, Sussex, 2015
Yifawn Lee & Nader Rasti Collection, Hong Kong



group of wooden incense burners which I mounted on *xuan* paper to allow the addition of inscriptions and seals. I produced a dozen of them, from which he chose one as a reciprocal gift. **AKIO.98**

Alongside their playthings, I also painted the sages, monks and literati who created or patronised them. **AKI8.1**

As I shifted to painting energy, the patterns of nature, the Dao, I started to seek the essence of painting, a process we can see in the context of strange stones. I started by painting mimetic images of stones. **AKIO.7**

Then I painted the idea of stones. **AKI5.I30**

Then I painted the surface pattern and energy of stones. **AK22.I4**

Then I followed the essence of what the stone *meant* as a meditational aid, and the stones began dissolving into their setting as energy, fraying at the edges as the patterns of reality merged with their source. **AK23.7**

Strange stones, the highest form of sculpture in the hierarchy of Chinese aesthetics, are transformational aids. As I came to understand that, I found myself charting their course on this profound journey – universal energy, expressed with the brush. Understanding that all knowing creativity is aimed at profundity makes it far easier to investigate, perceive and express that idea beyond the art object.

A 'forever painting' is 'finished' when it reaches the point where any further layers might decorate but not improve. As much of the painting paints itself, so it is also involved in declaring, 'Enough!'

Then the second two 'perfections' are added in the form of text and seals. Text conveys meaning through language, whether straightforward or arcane, but calligraphy and vermilion seals also offer a powerful formal dimension to painting, which is why they were combined so long ago in Chinese art.

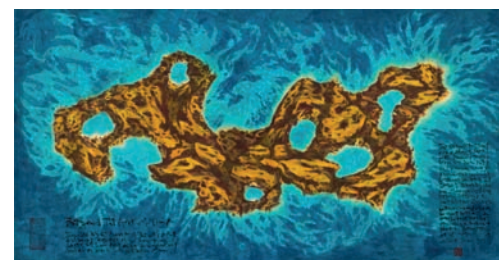
Inscriptions and titles generally suggest themselves as the painting evolves, but the text isn't composed until the painting is finished. I write on a computer, and refine, though not obsessively; a draft is rarely edited more than once before I pick up a brush, making last changes as I inscribe.

Gweilo ('ghost man') is a derogatory term for westerners in Hong Kong, which, with the self-deprecatory humour of the British, came to be worn as a badge of honour. I coined the term 'gweilography' for my English texts

written with the brush and intent of a Chinese calligrapher. When I found that I needed text to complete the Three Perfections I didn't speak Chinese and understood that it would take a long time to learn the language to the point of being able to decide *what* to write, and a lifetime to learn *how* to write it elegantly. I was all too aware that I was still struggling with literary English without taking on the task of mastering a second language. I was also middle-aged. Many of my artist friends were also calligraphers and I had learned from them what they were doing and how. I had also read and understood a lot about the art form, so I decided to calligraph in the Chinese tradition, but in English. My idler's approach to the need for calligraphy turned out to be a beneficial attention magnet. Even while I was still gaining confidence in my gweilography, people would notice what I was doing simply because I was writing in English. It was the 'pig can sing' syndrome: initially it didn't matter how well I was singing, only that I was. It took a long time to become wholly confident when writing inscriptions. My experience of Fang Zhaoling's work also led me to practise calligraphy without imagery, something she did regularly. So from time to time, often to test new brushes, I just wrote. **AKI9.7**

But I still flirt with Chinese calligraphy. I can write seal script, which is more pictorial and easier to copy than other scripts, and for that very reason less intriguing as an exercise. From time to time I have used Chinese scripts as an opportunity to do what I can do, which is to interpret.

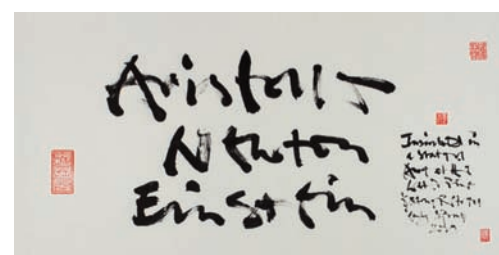
AKI5.II2 is a favourite 'adjustment' of Chinese running script. I went through various dictionaries of running script characters by great calligraphers of the past and selected versions of the five characters of my studio name that fitted together comfortably. Then I treated them as I treat images of walking staves, painting from the back of cloud-dragon paper to adumbrate them in reverse, the most difficult part of the process. Then I interpreted the image on the front and tickled up the calligraphic shortcomings of the reversed marks to make them work as walking-staff-like calligraphy. It turned out to be an unexpectedly long process, but satisfying throughout.



AK22.I4
Beyond the Arrow of Time
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
98 × 189 cm, Hong Kong, 2022



AK23.7
One Two Three
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
Triptych, each sheet 142 × 79 cm, Hong Kong, 2023



AKI9.7
Aristotle, Newton, Einstein
Ink on xuan paper
70 × 138 cm, Hong Kong, 2019

AKI5.II2
Shuisongshi shanfang (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat),
Dragon Staves Reconfigured as Meaning
Ink on cloud-dragon paper
Six sheets, each 143 × 79 cm, Sussex, 2015



Over the years I have painted about one hundred paintings a year, including the many smaller works on western paper which I often do at home in the evenings. Painting is an obsession. I also paint when flying, in hotels, and on occasion, if hijacked into a holiday, on a beach.

I have more than one hundred seals, some commissioned from seal artists or given to me by them, some bought old for their recyclable meaning, and some carved myself. I am a shameless recycler. There should be a Nobel Prize for Plagiarism as without it civilisation wouldn't exist; it is impossible to be creative without the creativity that went before us, and I mine it enthusiastically! Even my studio name is recycled. I bought a studio identification by Wu Changshuo and adopted it – The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat – and amusingly was advised by my artist friends that it was not truly Chinese as it had one character too many! I showed them the endorsement of a major early twentieth-century artist and they mumbled that, ah, yes, well occasionally it was all right. Their response had nothing to do, of course, with the number of characters; it was just a reaction to my using them at all. The Nodding Stone Garden was a name given to the family home in Sussex with its glorious gardens by the artist Ho Huai-shuo after staying with us. The Garden at the Edge of the Universe is a Daoist thought, but also a wry nod to Douglas Adams, a favourite author famous for *A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and for books about a holistic detective agency, in one of which a character, when asked how he had learned to fly, replied, 'Easy. You just throw yourself at the ground and miss.' Visionary artists throw themselves at reality and miss. And then they fly.

Should anyone piece my inscriptions together, their common thread would be obvious: they are all, one way or another, about painting the Dao, stepping off the Stage of Time and directly experiencing 'other worlds', the wilderness of the imagination, couched in poetic terms, sometimes even as poems following the Chinese tradition. I write Chinese poetry, but not in Chinese.

Notes

8 See 'The Riven Reality of Consciousness', one of many essays on transculturalink.com. Also covered in *Art Reboot*, op. cit.

9 See 'Authenticity in Art', *ibid.*

10 I should make it very clear at this point that I do not denigrate any art from any culture because of a lack of maturity in that culture's aesthetic response. In the West, for instance, premodern artists were doing what artists have always done; the only difference is that they had to do so with certain constraints imposed by religion, philosophy and science. That never stops an artist being an artist, or inhibits great art. Once we learn to look past the surface subject matter, an ancient western masterpiece carries all the lofty meaning in the inner languages of line, form, colour and texture as a modern or ancient Chinese masterpiece. The impulse, focus and emphasis may differ, but the artistic vision does not.

11 Some of the most highly valued calligraphic examples from the past are acknowledged as inauthentic objects, as with the famous *Lanting Preface* of the fourth-century artist Wang Xizhi. The original is said to have been buried with the emperor several centuries later, who had it stolen from its reclusive owner in the Tang dynasty. But tracings and other copies survived and were copied over and over again, and were frequently carved into stone so that rubbings could be widely disseminated. All carry some weight of meaning for the process, and are valued accordingly.

12 Ed. Josh Yiu, *Writing Modern Chinese Art: Historiographic Explorations* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 90

13 Another Chinese term for the idea is 'Strange Gates' (*Qimen*), the 'strange' being the same concept as in 'strange stones'.

14 It is my conviction that at some level creativity involves abstraction; the artist is abstracting reality. The level at which this takes place may vary depending upon perspective, but the fundamental process of reinterpreting reality is to reach for essence, which inevitably involves abstraction in the broader sense.

15 Here I must acknowledge the seminal contribution to my art and life of Nicolas Chow, the creative genius who became the driving force of Sotheby's Asian Art department in the 2000s. His grandfather, the epic dealer and collector Eddie Chow, was one of my earliest mentors, so we had a connection. It was Nicolas who first took my paintings seriously and encouraged me to do the same.

16 I'm sure someone, possibly Picasso, came up with that little aphorism long ago, but it is a fairly obvious one for a truly creative artist, even if left unexpressed verbally.

PAINTING
THE DAO

Alchemical Wedding

THERE IS NO DOUBT in my mind that I could not have followed the creative path I have without being deeply involved in art theory. In the western art revolution, artists thought deeply about what they were doing, as did critics and other influential figures, but diverted by the excitement of the infinitely-expanded horizons of creativity, they all focused on isms rather than on underlying purpose. By recognising the need for a transcultural theory linking art and consciousness to what happened in that revolution, and by grasping the crucial shift of focus from product to process, with the help of my Chinese artist friends I was able to test theory against current practice. I am certain of the theory, if not yet of its authority. Integrated, theory and practice become far more powerful than the sum of their parts, and set free creative imagination as inner alchemist, granting access to a deeper reality where anything is possible and governing rules evaporate like morning mist in a thousand wilderness ravines.

Everyday reality, the world of red dust as the Chinese tradition has it, has not ceased to exist, of course. It is just that I am able to transcend its constraints, recognising them as the limitations of our interpretations of a more profound reality where perception and expression are emancipated.

James Baldwin said: 'The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been concealed by the answers.' It is a common feeling that there is something about art, about the creative urge, the need to express vision, that carries something of vaster importance to us than we can explain. That essential 'something' may be beyond the reach of our intellectual languages of explanation but is rendered accessible in the alchemical wedding of theory and practice.

The limitless realms of a fresh sheet of paper await. Incense smoke drifts lazily above the painting table, forming, with the slightest invisible

stirring of air, ephemeral images of sylphs and sages, as the inkstone pond glistens with infinite potential. Taking up the brush, now an extension of body, mind and heart, I step again through the Gates of Wonder.

My intention here has been to sum up what it is I aspire to, and how I perceive and express it. The underlying point is that what I aspire to in creativity is neither 'modern' nor 'traditional'; it is timeless. Shock value, novelty, propaganda for surface issues, all have their place in communicating meaning. All are part of creativity, of existence, but to fulfil consciousness rather than only briefly to entertain it, we need the alchemical wedding of practice and theory.

Another seal I use frequently was carved for me by my friend, the radical Hong Kong calligrapher Fung Ming-chip: 'Let ink be my immortality'. Let my art, and all the inscriptions dealing with the philosophy of art, consciousness and life, be my immortality. But no rush; if it all happened before I died, I'd have to deal with it elegantly, which might be a challenge.

Hugh Moss

*At the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe
surrounded by nodding stones*



listening to the Falls
on the painting to bit

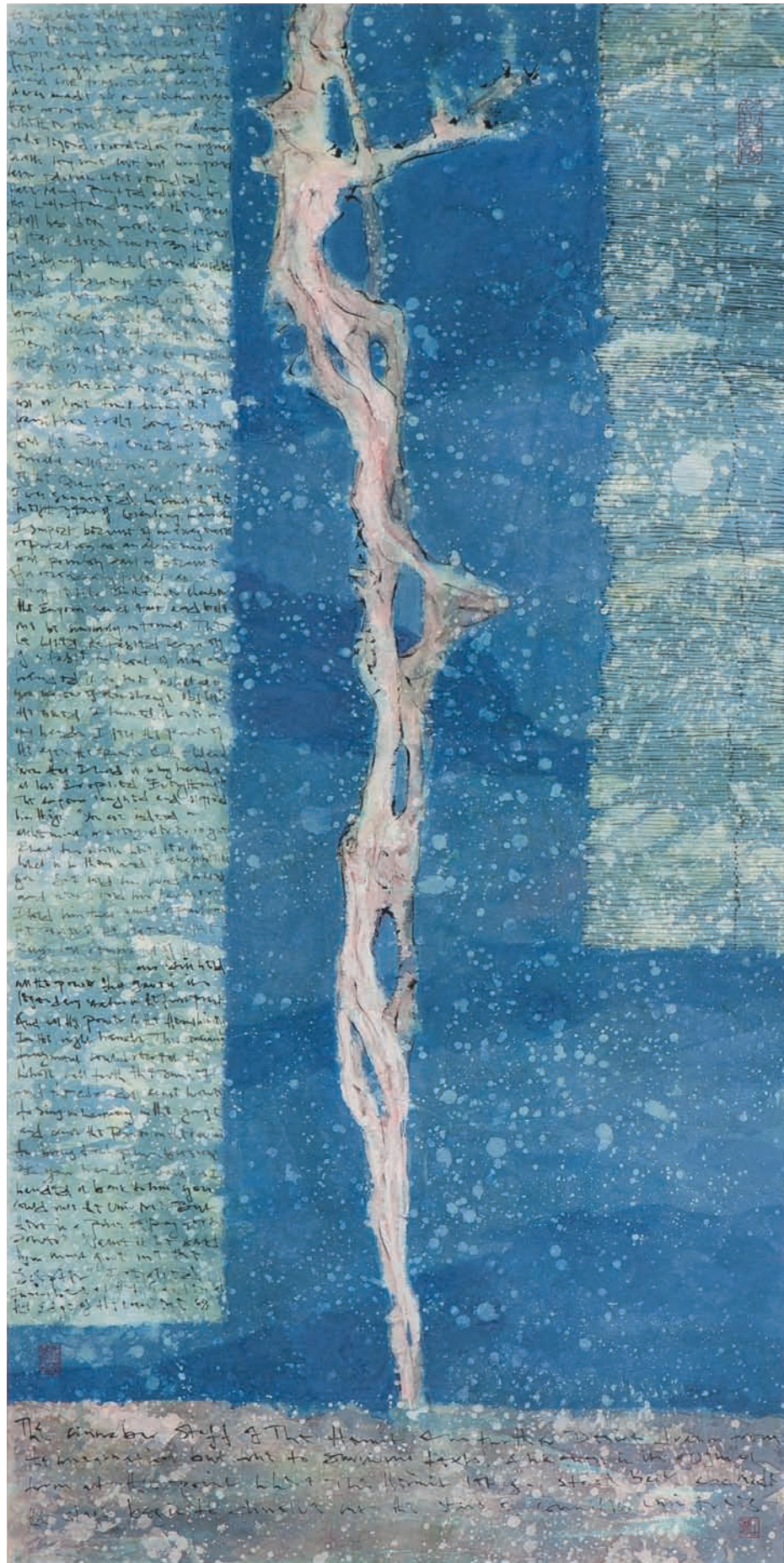
Inserted by the
Master of the
Vessel

King of the
Rohat in the
Throat of the
Gardens of the
Fog of the
Universe
Gardens of the



CATALOGUE

The paintings are shown in chronological order



AK8.2 *The Cinnabar Staff of the Hermit of No Further Desires*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

139.0 × 69.5 cm, Bangkok, 2008

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

人磨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

士擣 *Shibui* [name]

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:

Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 8–9

Through the Gates of Wonder: Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat from the K. Y. Ng Collection (Hong Kong: CA Book Publishing, 2022), 60–1

INSCRIPTION

The Cinnabar Staff of the Hermit of No Further Desires is reputed to have been made out of a core of purple sandalwood covered in deer-hoof glue and cinnabar lacquer inlaid with fragments of coral. But it was made so many centuries ago that no one can say any more whether this is true or not. According to the legend (recorded on two original scrolls, long-since lost, although corrupted later versions were recorded in late-Ming printed editions), by the latter Han dynasty the original staff had been broken and repaired at least a dozen times. By the Tang dynasty it had become divided into two fragments. The lower two-thirds were mounted with a jade bird-head handle and transformed into a walking staff for the ailing penultimate ruler. The top became a *ruyi* of ultimate wish-granting power. The emperor's stick was lost at some time during the transition to the Song dynasty but the *ruyi* ended up in the private collection of the Qianlong emperor.

I was summoned to court in the twelfth year of Qianlong, mainly I suspect because of an exaggerated reputation as an alchemist, but possibly partly because of a secondary talent as a storyteller. In the Inner Chamber, the emperor was at ease and bade me be similarly informal. Then he hefted the fabled *ruyi* off a table in front of him and handed it to me. 'What do you know of this strange object?' he asked. I turned it over in my hands. I felt the power of the ages, the power of the wand. 'Now that I hold it in my hands,' I replied, 'everything.' The emperor laughed and slapped his thigh. 'You are indeed an alchemist . . . or a very clever rogue. I have two scrolls here. Tell me what is in them and I shall believe you.' So I told him, word for word, then I told him far more. I told him that quite apart from the powers of the years, the staff as a remnant of the Cinnabar Staff also still held all the power that gave it its legendary status in the first place, and all the power of the Hermit himself. In the right hands, this remaining fragment could recreate the whole, call forth the sunset and the clouds, cause wolves to sing in harmony in the gorge and cause the river in the gorge to bring forth plum blossoms. '[With this] in your hands,' I said as I handed it back to him, 'you could rule the universe. But there is a price to pay for such power.' 'Name it!' he said. 'You must give up the sceptre,' I replied.

Inscribed at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, '08.

The Cinnabar Staff of the Hermit of No Further Desires drawn from the mists of time but true to surviving texts. A likeness in its original form at the point where the Hermit let go, stood back and made the staff begin to dissolve into the stars of countless universes.



AK8.62 *Too Powerful to Hold*
Ink and watercolour on Arches paper
36.0 × 8.5 cm, Sussex, 1998–2004

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 24

AK8.91 *The Light*

Ink and watercolour on paper
38 × 17 cm, Sussex, winter 2003

One painted artist seal

石 Shi (Stone)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time, i: Realised Realms* (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 60

INSCRIPTION

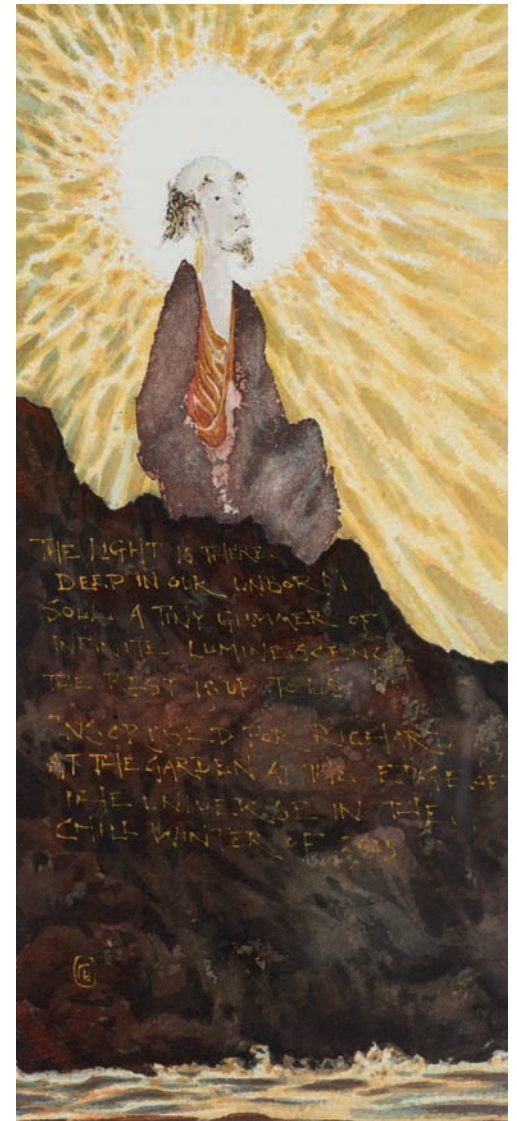
The light is there deep in our unborn soul, a tiny glimmering of infinite luminescence – the rest is up to us.

Inscribed for Richard at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the chill winter of 2003.

Colophon

[Not inscribed on the painting]

Which Richard this was painted for has slipped beyond the reach of my memory, along with what I had for breakfast, but I'm rather glad he never got the chance to accept it. I think I hadn't finished the halo at the time and then we both forgot about it. Must have been pissed.





AK8.II3 *Hermit Who Climbed into a Tree, No.3*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

136.5 × 68.0 cm, Sussex, March 1993

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

偶然得之 *Ouran dezhi* (Achieved by accident)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, i:
Realised Realms (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 68–9

INSCRIPTION

Ancient Forest

The word grew until each disciple of the silent sage was surrounded by a myriad more.
Forests of meaning grew up everywhere and matured into gnarled old trees of truth while
the river drifted timelessly by, reflecting glimpses of infinite halos as it gently washed
smooth the word.

Analogies of the Khlongmaster, inscribed at the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, 1993.

AK9.I *Walking Staves at Rest Series, No.3*

Ink and watercolour on cotton paper

96.7 × 211.5 cm, Bangkok, 2009

One artist seal

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)





AK9.5 *Walking Staves at Rest Series, No.4 – Ice Maiden*

Ink and watercolour collage on cotton paper

95.5 × 208.0 cm, Bangkok, 2009

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:

Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 52–3

INSCRIPTION

I have enjoyed the delights and dangers of more than a thousand walking staves over the centuries, the fundamental categorisation of staves being proactive staves and passive staves. The former, though more exciting, carry with them the danger of overwhelming a master and taking control. I suffered many such moments while learning the art of the staff master. I have wrestled with unruly thunder staves, star staves, lightning staves and riven-reality staves, and many times been forced to yield control and just hang on for the ride and try to stay alive. But to survive such moments brings greater power and greater control of these challenging staves.

Although I have owned as many as a hundred staves, I have only ever owned one water staff, and encountered only two more amongst the Brethren of the Staff. The one I owned was already ancient by the time I acquired it in the turmoil following the fall of the Han dynasty; it was also already named Ice Maiden. There is little cause for gender distinctions among mystics and anyone who is able to harness the power of a staff is, by definition, a mystic. Stepping off the Stage of Time unites all mystics with a perspective which tends to rise above petty distinctions, but for some reason, lost in the margins of time, all the water staves I encountered were given female names and my own one proved no exception. She must have been called Ice Maiden because of the frosty appearance of her surfaces. She looked as if she might originally have been carved from a glacier, but I suspect that arose from ancient coats of protective lacquer added to the surface of the natural vine to give it greater strength and longevity.

Water staves might have many other powers, as did most staves, but derived their name from their affinity with and their power over water in its many forms. If Ice Maiden were unable to find water, even in the Taklamakan Desert she could certainly organise a local thunderstorm to provide it. We mountain men as a rule do not lack water, indeed it is a surfeit of water from which we occasionally suffer; I have rarely seen a retreat built by a recluse without a leak, whether thatched with straw or covered with plantain leaves or shingles of wood. The only time I had no problem with a leaky roof was when I had no roof while building a new home in the mountains of Shu. Before I built the roof I laid Ice Maiden along the floor, beneath where my ridge beam would eventually run, and when it rained the water thought there was a roof.

I left Ice Maiden in my retreat when I left the mountains of Shu. She was content there, and seldom used. An ancient tree had fallen beside the mountain torrent beside which I'd built my home and over the years had been eaten by insects and was riddled with channels. With each successive spring snowmelt it was immersed in freezing water for several months, hardening the wood to the point where the insects could no longer wreak their deprivations. I hauled it forth and laid it beside my hearth. Ice Maiden settled just above it, floating as befits a water staff. They became almost inseparable. Before long the colours of Ice Maiden began to seep into the perforated trunk, turning it into an image of surf at sunset. I shall return one day to test again its power.

AK9.20 *The River-borne Censer*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper mounted on cotton paper
52 × 74 cm, Bangkok, 2009

Two artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

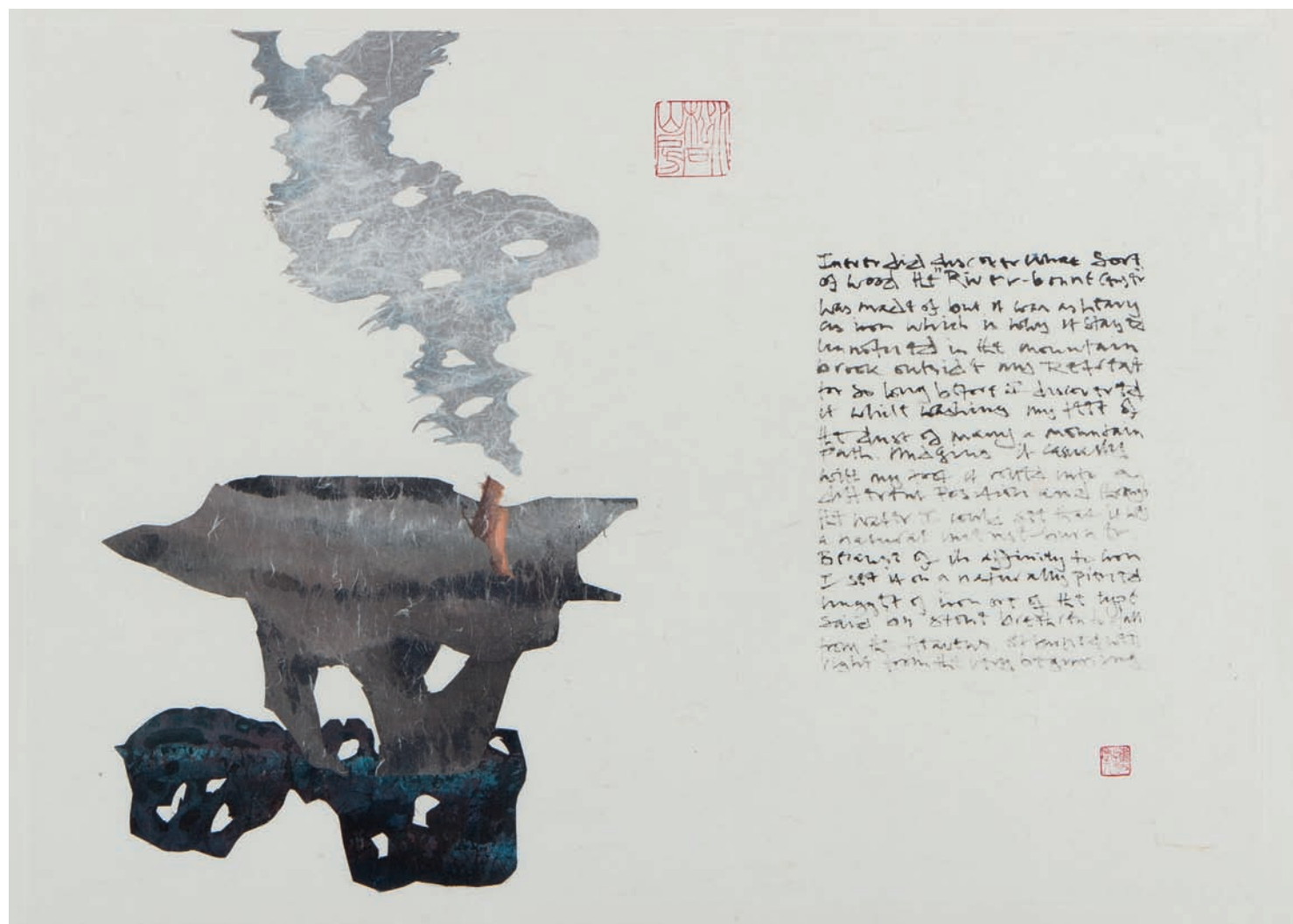
攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 62

INSCRIPTION

I never did discover what sort of wood the River-borne Censer was made of, but it was as heavy as iron, which is why it stayed unnoticed in the mountain brook outside my retreat for so long before I discovered it while washing my feet of the dust of many a mountain path. Nudging it casually with my foot, it rolled into a different position and through the water I could see that it was a natural incense burner. Because of its affinity to iron, I set it on a naturally-pierced nugget of iron ore of the type said by stone brethren to fall from the heavens. It burned well right from the very beginning.





AKIO.37 *Lost behind the Stone*

Ink and watercolour on cotton paper, mounted for framing

211 × 95 cm, Bangkok, spring 2010

Ten artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat; two different seals)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

人磨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

无爲 *Wuwei* (Without action)

有意无意 *Yuyi wuyi* (Between intention and no intention)

金石壽 *Jinshi shou* (Indefinite life)

一 二 三 *Yi er san* (One, two, three)

意外之喜 *Yiwai zhixi* (Happy accident)

偶然得之 *Ouran dezhi* (Achieved by accident)

INSCRIPTION

When a strategy fails it is time to either abandon it or lift it to a higher level. As an artist one faces this dilemma all the time. Every brushstroke opens up myriad possibilities. Every painting seems to transform one's art. The brush is merely something you cling to because you can't do it alone. The stone is beyond question. It is the largest stone I ever managed to lug back to my abode, although I had the serendipitous help of several visiting staff masters, one of whom owned a particularly powerful anti-gravity staff, which helped. Too large by far for a studio stone, we placed it after a little judicious use of the chisel outside the house where we could gaze on it every morning as we strolled to the edge of the brook to get water for tea. It was an hour-stone, changing subtly as the day progressed, its shadows tickling the imagination as the day slipped towards dusk, taking intention with it. I have left so many houses high in the mountains over the years, but not long ago I went back to one in the mountains of Shu and found there a painting I had done of the stone at the time. It had darkened but was largely undamaged so I added this inscription to record my delight.

A pool of purple blood bleeds into the studio. I suspect it is a noble *ruyi*, but in fact it is not a *ruyi* at all, other than symbolically. I once lived with the Three-toothed Hermit, although by the time I met him he had only two; the third was lost in an unfortunate incident with a turnip. I forget how many decades I spent with him, but every few years I would declare it his birthday and carve him a *ruyi* sceptre from the fragments of ancient trees that surrounded his mountain home [...]

At the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, Bangkok, '10.

Given our circumstances as recluses without a particularly powerful walking staff, it was difficult to gather large stones, but at the walking-staff symposium there were many willing hands. We managed to drag back from other mountains the largest stones I have ever had the pleasure to edit with my chisel. I really like the way the words disappear. Very decent of them and appreciated.

[The text block bottom left is illegible in parts and is not transcribed above.]



AK10.55 *The Ram and his Man*

Ink on cloud-dragon paper mounted on *xuan* paper
198.0 × 54.5 cm, Bangkok, summer 2010

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

无爲 *Wuwei* (Without action)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 84–5

INSCRIPTION

Among the many naturalistic staves I have carved over the years, the Ram and his Man remains a favourite. It is now a century and a half since I last held it in my hands and felt its surging energy. It is twice that long since I carved it from a branch cut from a gnarled ancient prunus overhanging a canal in Lin'an, outside the garden wall of a scholar friend with whom I often stayed when I left my mountain retreat in the wilderness of Mount Gu. He too was born in the year of the ram, and suggested I cut a particular branch from the tree and take a vague image that resembled a ram's head and carve it more precisely as the top of the staff. His suggestion was a good one.

As my chisel bit into the grain, the head emerged effortlessly and with a forceful personality. He was a fine ram. My friend laughed to see it as it emerged. He was so intent upon examining it closely as I carved, rarely leaving my side for a moment, that I also carved his image, standing in his casual robes, leaning over, face to face with the ram, the two staring intently at each other. He was so delighted, that I promised it to him as a gift for his upcoming birthday. As soon as I knew it was to be a birthday gift, the rest of the carving almost designed itself. Burgeoning beneath the scholar and the ram were plentiful ancient *lingzhi*, their heads like *ruyi* sceptres, to bring him whatever he might wish for. These I set growing on ancient gnarled branches quite unlike the stems of natural *lingzhi*, but for the artist there are no rules that govern the depiction of nature, only those that arise out of it. Strange branches grew from a cluster of jagged stones around the lower half of the shaft, both ancient branches and stone wishing my friend longevity.

It was finished in time and the day of celebration was sumptuous, as my friend had fulfilled a complete cycle, a major event to those who face mortality. Although the final coating of lacquer was barely dry, let alone hardened, I inscribed it with one of his iron brushes. In the lesser script of the Qin, always one of his favourite scripts, I quoted an excerpt from a poem of the Han dynasty, almost as ancient as the script in which it was written. It was one of the earliest mentions in the literature of a walking staff as anything more than useful support.

At dawn I am nourished by the pure dew,
Or I go through the frost and become harder.
My spirit hides in mystery to conceal itself;
Who but a Man of the Way could grasp me?

Then I signed it and added two seals, rubbing cinnabar dust into them before presenting it to him, tied with a sash – a further wish for longevity. He treasured that staff for his remaining years, and in our journeys together in the foothills and valleys we found that it had a strange way with the creatures of the forest, calming the fierce and attracting even the shyest. He was a gentle and noble scholar, much given to study of the mystic realm, but he was not himself an adept, nor granted an extraordinary span of years, so eventually his time came to depart the dusty world. I was summoned from my retreat to attend him by his book-servant. Before he died he gave me back the Ram and his Man, as he had long since named it, and bade me honour it as he had.

As the Ming gave way to the Qing, I carried it with me to several retreats in various mountain wildernesses, and enjoyed its unusual control over the animals of the wild. When one is alone for long periods of time, a friendly crane can be an excellent companion and such friendships became more than simple metaphors for the subject matter of paintings. I parted with it finally as a gift to a fellow hermit with whom I had spent some years. He was bound for the southern jungles where dangerous creatures abound and he would have greater need of it than I, who am rarely bothered by animals of the wild. He promised to return one day to my then retreat, and if I was absent lay it in a deep cave we designated, where a natural stone altar stood. But I left those mountains some years thereafter and have not been back since. Perhaps he has returned it or will yet, for he was a true mystic and unfettered by the dictates of time and the staff would have helped to protect him from other harm.

Recalling its every contour to paint so many years later presents no difficulty. Each stroke of the chisel, every twisted branch and gnarled fungus, each rocky ledge remain with me still and to recreate it with a brush comes as naturally as breathing, as long as one does not stop to think about it.

At the Garden at the Edge of the Universe,
reaching for my thunder staff as the rains begin in the early summer of 2010.

AKII.2 *Out of the Incense*

Ink on cloud-dragon paper

78 × 141 cm, Hong Kong, February 2011

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongsishi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

无爲 *Wuwei* (Without action)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:

Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 108–9

A Tale of Two Cities: Painting and Calligraphy by Shanghai and Hong Kong Artists

(Hong Kong: K. Y. Fine Art in association with the Shanghai Academy of Art, 2015), 36–7

INSCRIPTION

Having begun to recreate on paper many of the memorable stones, staves and *ruyi* I have either owned or encountered over the centuries, it occurs to me also to paint little likenesses of some of those friends who shared my passion for such objects. I have known so many staff masters, stone fools and *ruyiren* over the years, who were every bit as intriguing as the magical objects they owned. I prefer to depict them in a more fitting manner than that of traditional portraiture, allowing them to pop up where they will. The Incense-drunk Hermit was ever fond of sitting high in the mountains amidst the thick clouds, sometimes visible, sometimes lost to sight behind an ever-shifting white veil. Sometimes he would sit for many hours, even days. It was how he recharged his powers, and made sure he never lost his oneness with the light – difficult in eremitic retreats, but easy enough in the urban life of the dusty world. It seems appropriate, given his main passion, to depict him with a censer, emerging from the smoke as he would emerge from the clouds so long ago.

Inscribed at the Terrace at the Edge of the Universe, Hong Kong, 2011.

AKI2.42 *Learning from the Stone*

Ink on cloud-dragon paper mounted on cotton paper

189 × 214 cm, Hong Kong, April 2012

Two artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

石石狂 *Shishikuang* (Fool for stones)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:

Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 156–7

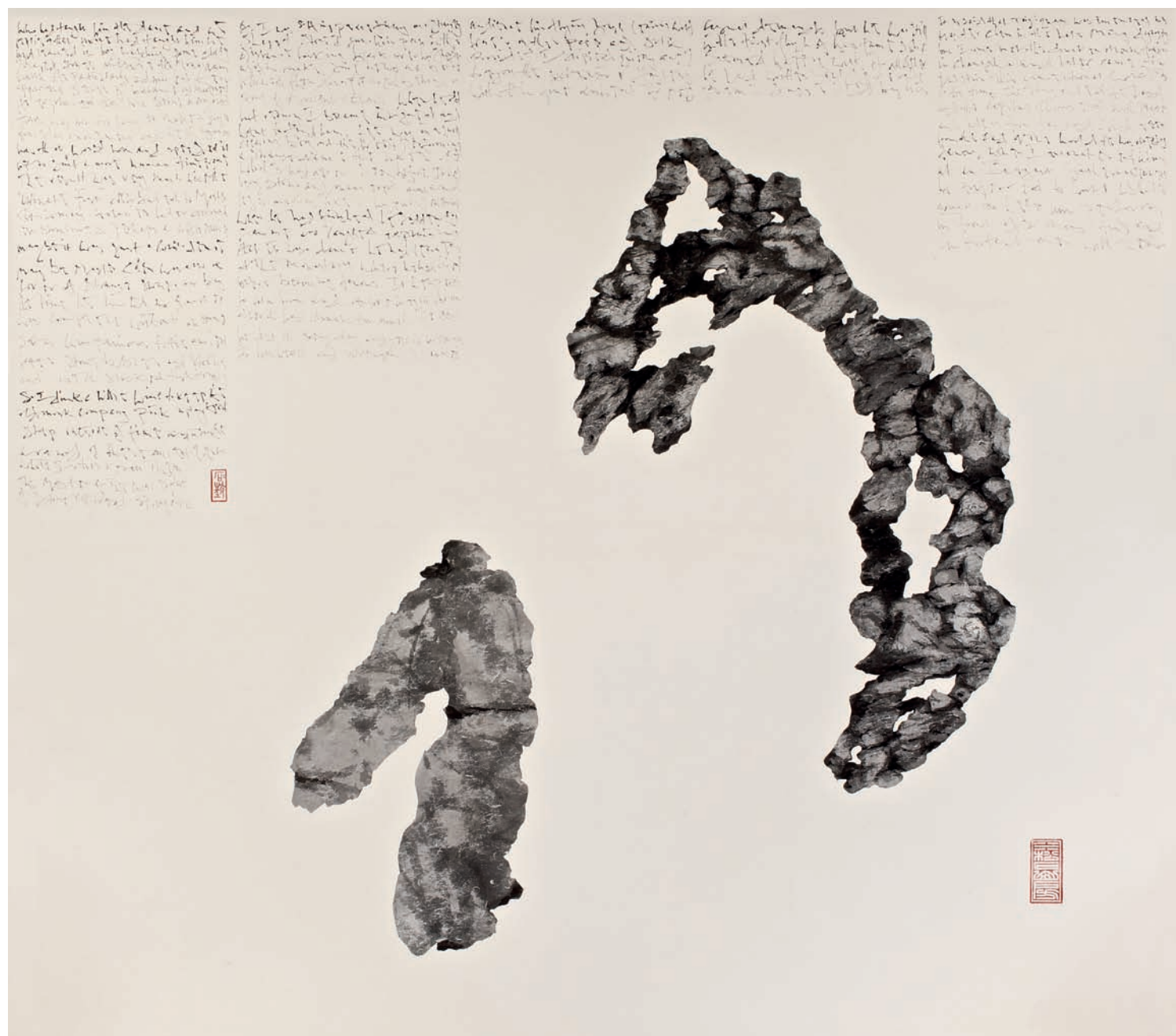
INSCRIPTION

It is said that *taijiquan* was invented by Master Chen in the late Ming dynasty, but I once met the drunken monk Huaisu in Changsha and later came to question this conventional wisdom. At the time, the Tang ruled the land and the capital thronged with people and ideas from far and wide, even from the end of the world. He was already famous when I encountered him at an elegant gathering. Perhaps he preferred to write while drunk to help him perform in front of so many fine and important men with their casual demands, but he was still in the first flush of his fame, so he seemed happy with it all. After he had written out several poems suggested by his audience, his flying brush leaving wild traces on the paper and silk provided, I slipped quietly away to enjoy the extensive gardens with their fine ancient trees. As I was sitting peacefully on a strangely-shaped stone, I saw him pass in the distance, looking back over his shoulder as if to make sure he was not being followed, then disappear behind a group of ancient cedars. When he did not return, I became intrigued and went to find him.

He was in a small clearing beyond the trees performing a strange dance the likes of which I had never seen before. It was very slow and mannered, arms and legs moving like a hypnotised snake. When he had finished he suddenly saw me and laughed, explaining that it was a dance he had learned at the monastery where he had lived before becoming famous. It helped to calm him and restore his equilibrium after he had drunk too much. He said he did it every day and felt it was beneficial to his health and strength. I asked who had taught him the dance and he replied that no one had taught him, he had learned it by watching some oddly-shaped stones outside the monastery walls. He particularly admired their apparent sense of balance and movement. He explained that, to a stone, myriad years were not too long to make a single graceful movement, and he imagined how that would look, and speeded it up to suit a more human time frame. The result was very much like the 'Ultimate Fist' attributed to Master Chen so many centuries later, although less structured, perhaps a little slower. Maybe it is just a coincidence. Maybe Master Chen was also a lover of strange stones, for by the time he lived no garden was complete without its stones set as companions to the ancient trees, stone tables and stools, and well-stocked fish ponds.

So I drink a little wine to keep the old monk company, pick up my brush, step outside of time, and inscribe a record of these ancient events while I still recall them.

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, spring 2012.





AKI2.47 *Arming the Forces of Nature, No.1*

Ink on Fabriano Artístico paper

70.0 × 53.5 cm, Hong Kong, May 2012

Seven artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

偶然得之 *Ouran dezhi* (Achieved by accident)

石石 *Shishi* (Stones)

莫 *Mo* [name]

士擣 *Shihui* [name]

Sage in the lotus [pictorial]

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:

Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 160

Exhibited

'Hugh Moss: Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat',

Hong Kong Club, 31 October 2016 – 9 February 2017

INSCRIPTION

Arming the forces of nature. A strange stone transformed by brush, paper and ink.

When painting strange stones one never knows quite what will emerge, but it is nearly always something that was captured in the stone but perhaps not fully visible, perhaps not visible at all. This strange stone was filthy from neglect and languishing poorly placed in an ugly stand on the floor of a shop in Cat Street, Hong Kong. It was begging to be released, so I released it and now I release it some more.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in the early summer of 2012.

AKI3.35 *Above the Treeline*
Ink on Arches paper
76 × 57 cm, Hong Kong, May 2013

One artist seal
竹虛老人 Zhuxu laoren (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

Published
The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time, i: Realised Realms* (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 114–5

Exhibited
'Hugh Moss: Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat',
Hong Kong Club, 31 October 2016 – 9 February 2017



AKI3.41 *Chan beyond the Painting*

Ink on cloud-dragon paper

72 × 97 cm, Sussex, July 2013

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

閒情似野鶴 *Xianqing si yehe* (Free as a wild crane)

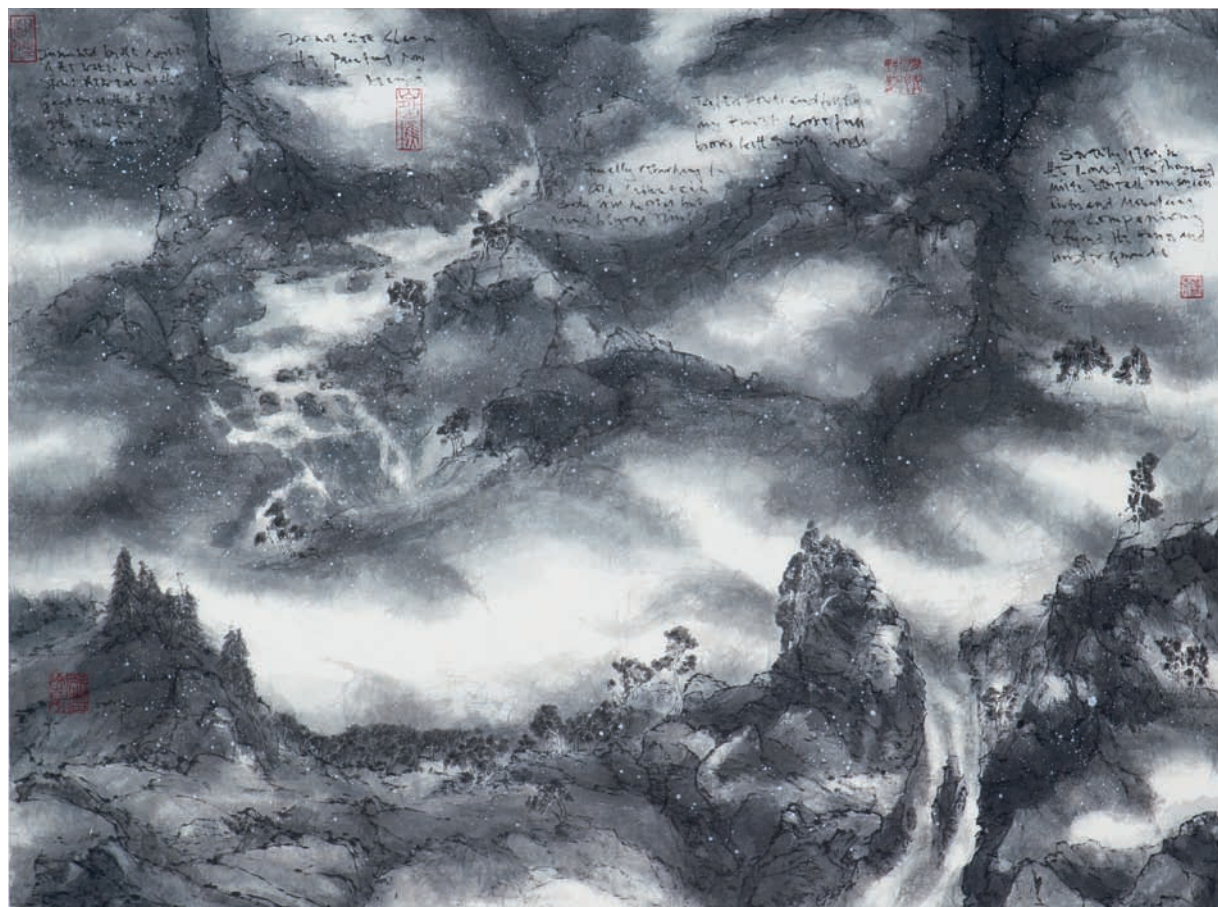
竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

INSCRIPTION

Seventy years in the world
Ten thousand miles beneath my sandals
Rivers and mountains my companions
Beyond the passes and border guards
Tasted power and filled my purse
Wrote full books with empty words
Finally returning to Cold Mountain
Body still mortal but mind beyond time

Do not seek Chan in the painting
Nor in the mind

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, Sussex, summer 2013.



AK13.79 *Tablescape, No.10 – Listening to the Falls on the Painting Table*

Ink on cloud-dragon paper

140.0 × 75.5 cm, Hong Kong, December 2013

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

石石狂 *Shishikuang* (Fool for stones)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time, i: Realised Realms* (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 130–1

Provenance

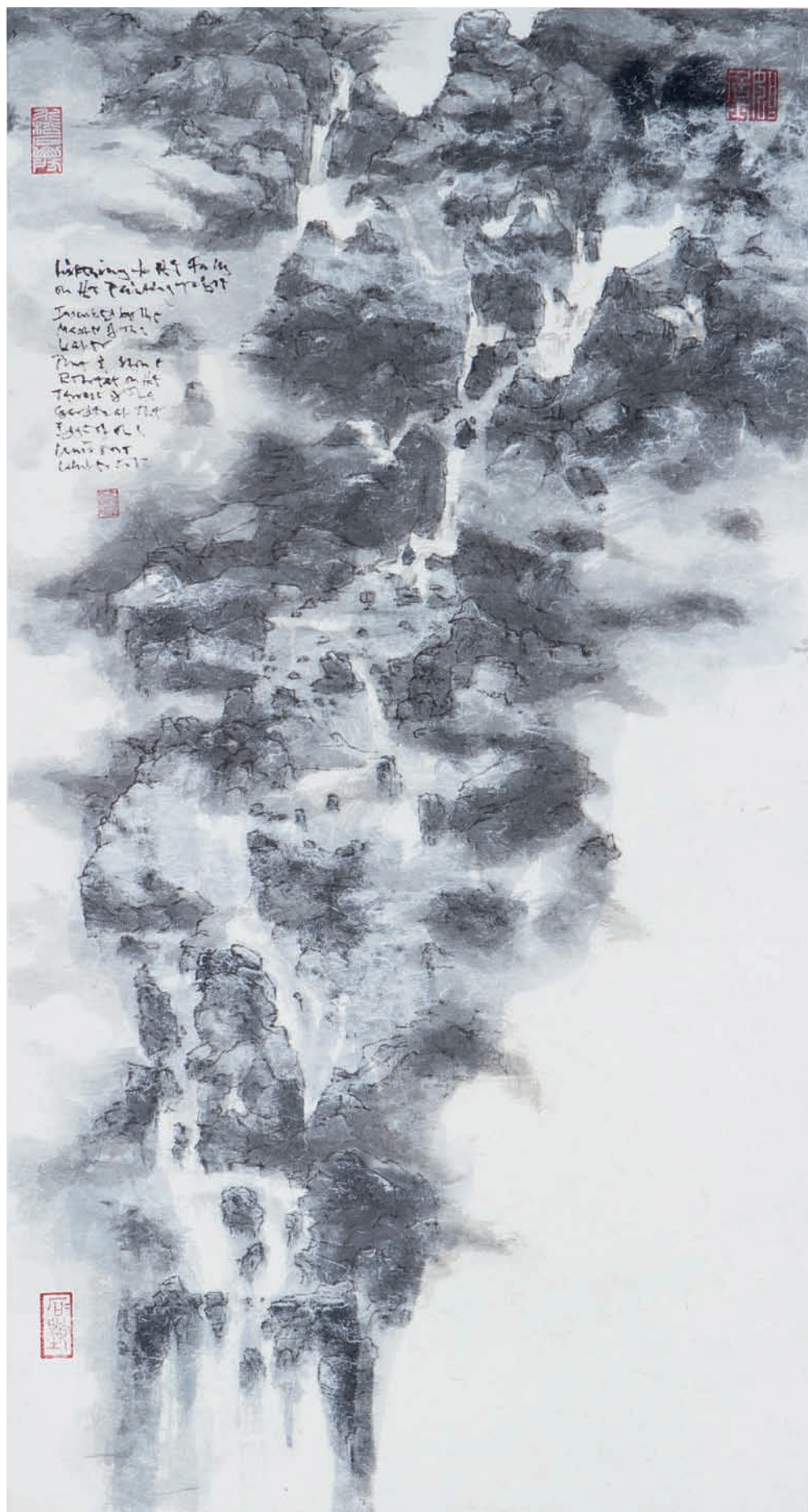
Ng Kai Yuen

Poly Hong Kong, Chinese Contemporary Ink Paintings, 5 October 2014, lot 185

INSCRIPTION

Listening to the Falls on the Painting Table

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
on the Terrace of the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, winter 2013.



AK14.16 *Five Dragon Sceptres for Old Stumble Stone, No.2*
 Ink and watercolour on Arches paper
 37.5 × 57.0 cm, Phuket, spring 2014

Two artist seals

攜杖老人 Xiezhang laoren (Old man who carries the staff)

一二三 Yi er san (One, two, three)

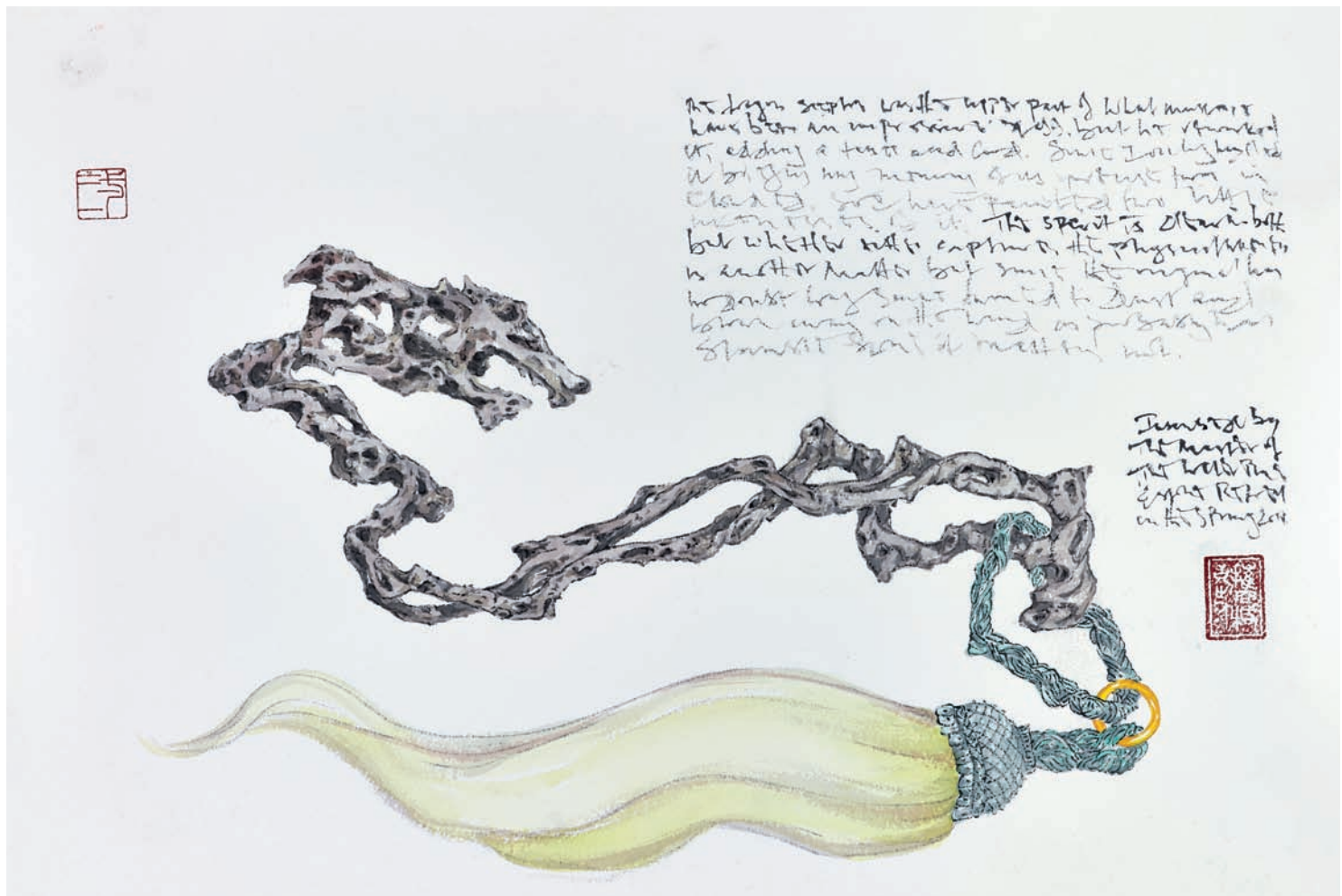
Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time, ii: Staff Masters and Stone Fools* (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 191

INSCRIPTION

The Dragon Sceptre was the upper part of what must once have been an impressive staff, but he had reworked it, adding a tassel and cord. Since I only handled it briefly, my memory of its precise form is clouded, so I have painted two little likenesses of it. The spirit is clear in both, but whether either captures the physical likeness is another matter. But since the original has, no doubt, long since turned to dust and blown away on the wind, as, probably, has Stumble Stone, it matters not.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in the spring, 2014.



AKI4.65 *The Philosopher's Stone*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper, laid down on *xuan* paper
97 × 179 cm, Sussex, summer 2014

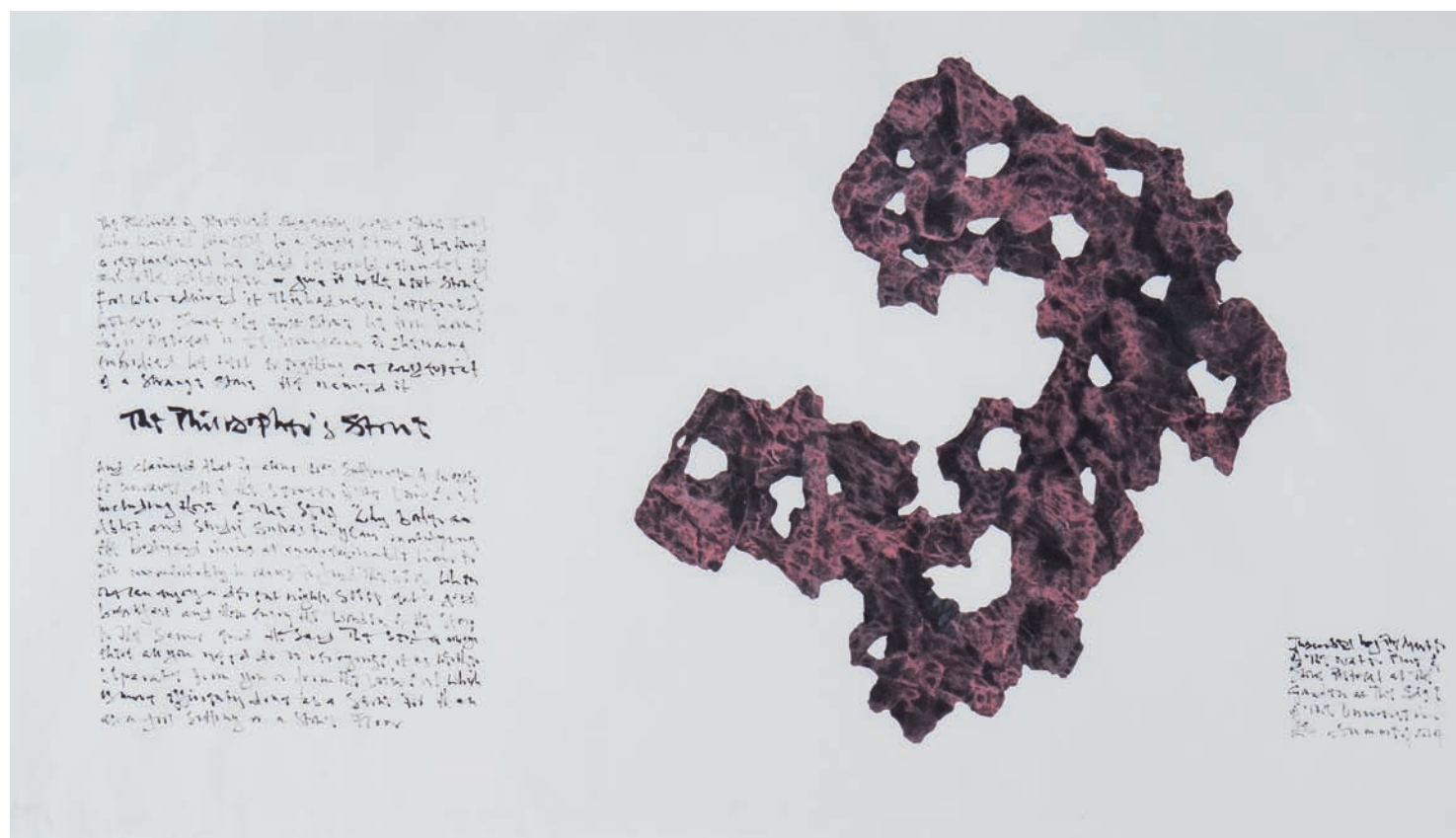
Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, Beyond the Stage of Time, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 206

INSCRIPTION

The Recluse of Received Sagacity was a stone fool who limited himself to a single stone. If he found a replacement, he said he would return the old one to the wilderness, or give it to the next stone fool who admired it. This had never happened, however, since the first stone he took home to his retreat in the mountains of Zhejiang embodied, he felt, everything one could expect of a strange stone. He named it 'The Philosopher's Stone' and claimed that it alone was sufficient in order to unravel all the secrets of the universe, including those of the self. 'Why bother an abbot and study Sutras for years, mortifying the body and rising at an unreasonable hour to sit uncomfortably in ranks in order to find the self, when one can enjoy the delights of a decent night's sleep, eat a good breakfast and then enjoy the wonders of the stone to the same end?' He said the self is always there; all you need do is recognise it as neither separate from you nor from the universe, which is more efficiently done as a stone fool than as a fool sitting on a stone floor.

Inscribed at the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the summer of 2014.



AKI4.99 *A Notable Irony*

Ink and watercolour on Arches paper
52 × 26 cm, New York, September 2014

One painted artist seal

石 Shi (Stone)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time, i: Realised Realms* (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 153

INSCRIPTION

A notable irony in the history of staves revolved around the Permanently Puzzled Lay Devotee of the Way, who carried with him his own homunculus, which, I suspect, did little to resolve his permanent puzzlement. He owned one of the finest Fire Staves I have ever encountered. Regrettably, it decided one day to self-immolate, thereby removing itself from the thrall of its owner, who, being a devotee of the Way, was indifferent to the outcome but enjoyed the spectacle, as did his homunculus.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Corner Suite of the Garden at the Edge of the Universe
in the early autumn of 2014, New York, late at night.



AKI6.58 *The Blind Stone Fool*

Pencil on paper board

50 × 40 cm, Sussex, summer 2016

Two artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

石石 *Shishi* (Stones)

Exhibited

'The Experience of Looking', Rasti Chinese Art, Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2–10 June 2019

INSCRIPTION

The Blind Stone Fool

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the summer of 2016.



AK16.79 *The Story of the Stone, No.2*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
152.0 × 72.5 cm, Hong Kong, December 2016

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)
如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 320

INSCRIPTION

Snow clouds part unexpectedly
The moon glimpses thousand-foot falls
Their song muffled between iced cliffs
Once again winter settles on the gorge
Closing in my silent world
Home-bound cranes recall to mind
The Resident of the Eastern Slope



AKI7.59 *Source Stone*

Ink and red wine on Arches paper

91 × 101 cm, Hong Kong, October 2017

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

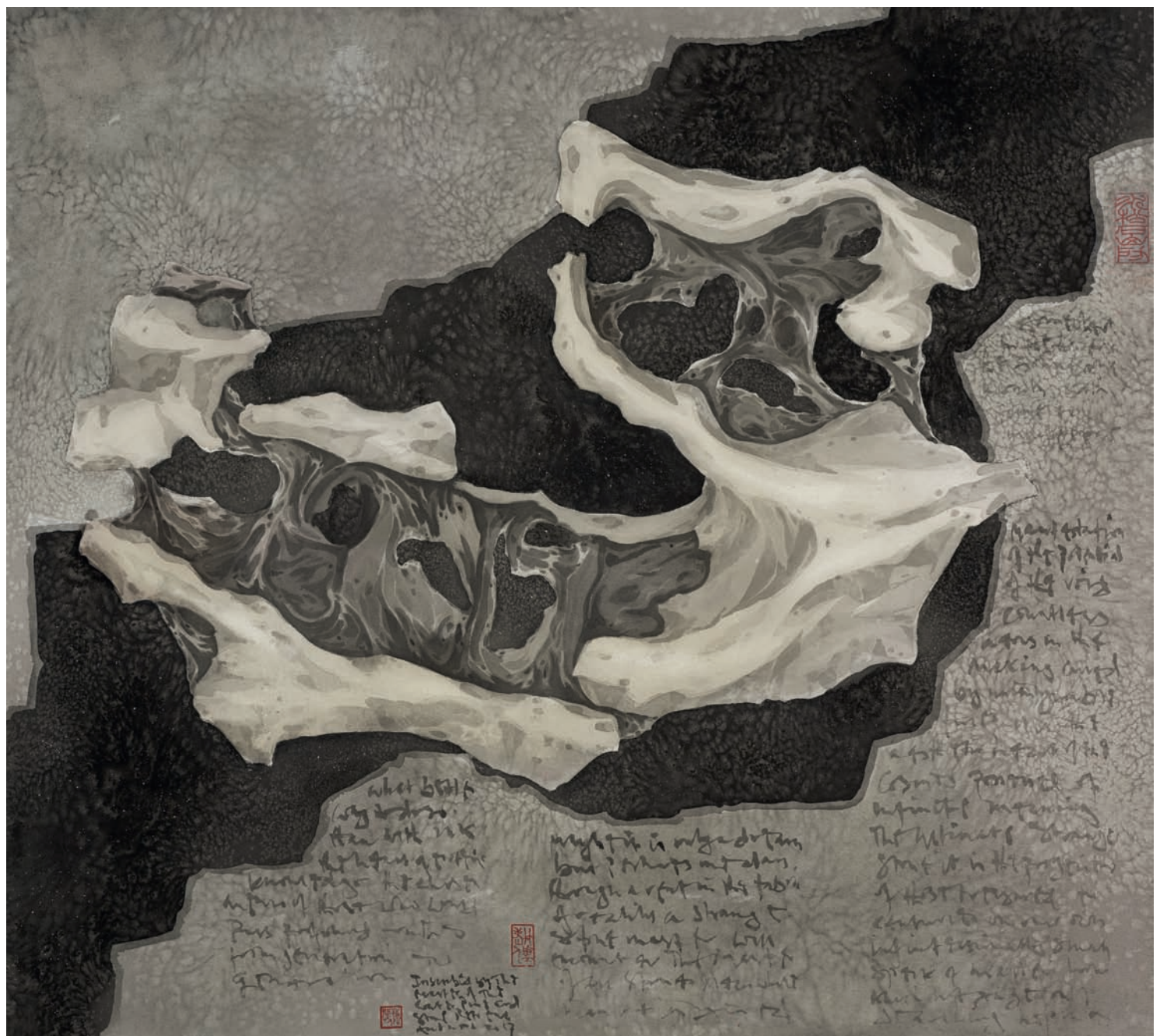
Published

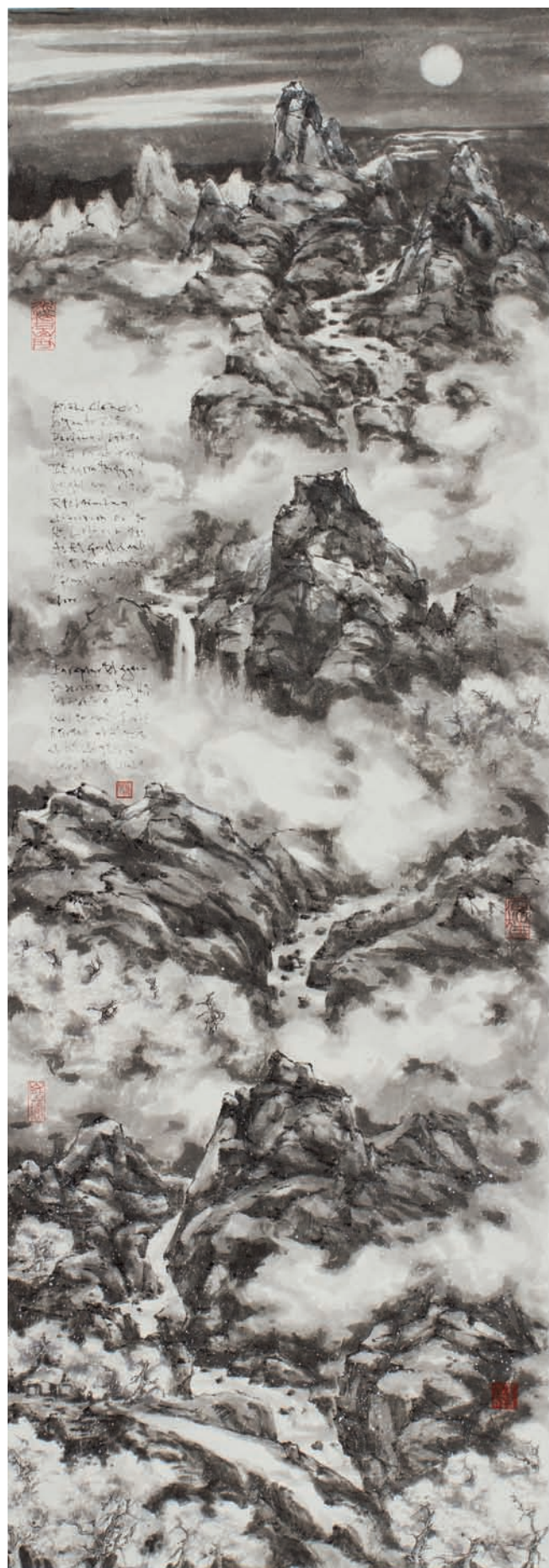
The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, ii:
Staff Masters and Stone Fools (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 336

INSCRIPTION

Somewhere in the universe the Source Stone awaits with timeless indifference. Manifestation of the potential of the Void, countless aeons in the making, carved by unimaginable forces, it is the aesthetic heart of the cosmos possessed of infinite meaning. It is the ultimate strange stone, progenitor of those treasured for centuries on our own infinitesimally small speck of matter, from which we gaze out, searching, hoping. Maybe it is only a dream, but perhaps one day, through a rent in the fabric of reality, a strange-stone master will encounter the Master of all Stones; in the meantime, it can be imagined. What better way to do so than with ink? The heart of esoteric knowledge, the chosen means of those who would pass profound truths from generation to generation.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, autumn 2017.





AK18.89 *Down from the Moon*

Ink and white watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
187 × 65 cm, Hong Kong, December 2018

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

Published

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, *Beyond the Stage of Time*, i:
Realised Realms (Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020), 222–3

INSCRIPTION

Snow clouds begin to clear

Parting flakes idle on the breeze

The moon emerges bright and clear

Reclaiming dominion over the wilderness

As the gorge chants its eternal poem

I push open my door

Enraptured again

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, winter 2018.

AK19.179 *Searching beyond the Snow-blind Sky*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
Handscroll, 32 × 720 cm, Hong Kong, December 2019

INSCRIPTION

Title Panel

Searching beyond the Snow-blind Sky

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the winter of 2019.

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)
竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)
石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

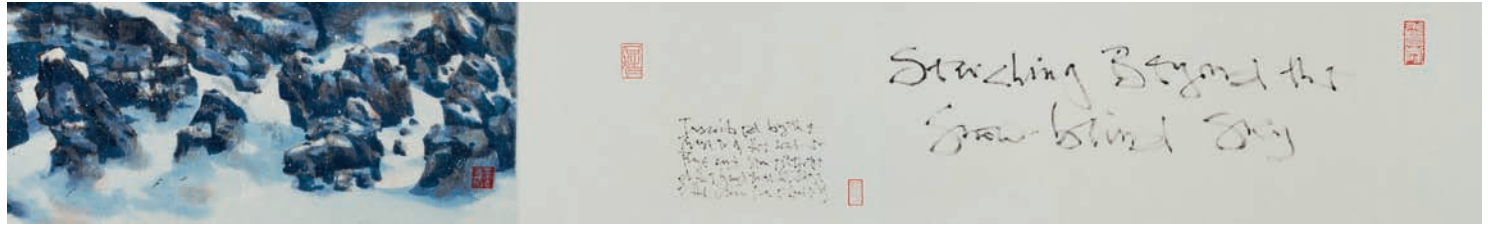
Painting

Searching beyond the snow-blind sky
I follow no path
Into the wilderness, unaccompanied
Save for my walking staff
And the muffled thump, thump
As trees shake off their first winter burden
Who knows where I shall shelter 'til spring returns

Three artist seals

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)
如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)
養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)





AK20.7 *Dream Journey to the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
Handscroll, 32 × 721 cm, Sussex, spring 2020

INSCRIPTION

Title Slip

Dream Journey to the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Two artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)
士撫 *Shihui* [name]

Title Panel

Dream Journey to the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

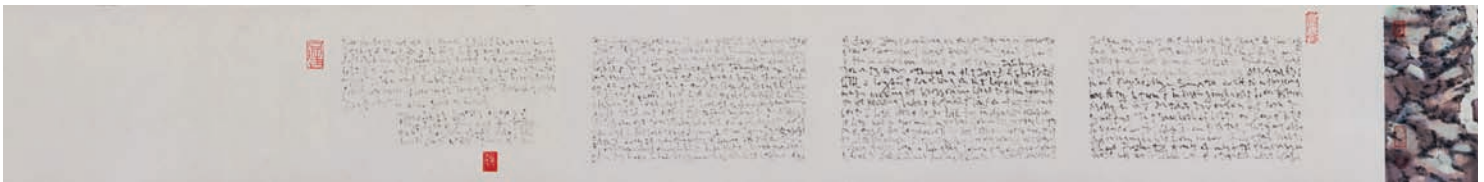
Two artist seals

水松石山房主人 *Shuisongshi shanfang zhuren* (Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

Painting

Four artist seals

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)
竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)
有意无意 *Youyi wuyi* (Between intention and no intention)
石 *Shi* (Stone)



Colophon

Dreamers have one foot on the Stage of Time and one beyond; regardless of whether they are asleep at the time. The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat is similarly situated. At present there is one physically in Sussex, another in Hong Kong, but they become indistinguishable from *Black Molly* in the Mediterranean, the corner suite at the Sukhothai Hotel or Eagle Tree in Vancouver when I am present. They are also indistinguishable from many in dream states – I have produced some of my best paintings in those, not all of which were reified in the world of dust.

Since arriving to enjoy spring in Sussex, a rare occurrence these past few years, I have been in a dream state in the studio, painting a journey to my retreat on the Isle of the Blessed with a log fire crackling in the hearth and *qin* music making the blossoming winter plum branches on the painting table tremble like an expectant lover.

I had little to do with the initial composition – it was not a normal, mortal journey to reach from one end of the handscroll to the other, from first step to destination. Between two foreground pine-strewn rocky paths lay a lengthy journey across an expanse of water with distant mountains. In the absence of a handy boatman, I travelled by *simurgh*.

I sat at the cliff's edge overlooking the inaccessible waters below, and calmed my mind, stepping beyond expectation until a crane alighted beside me. It had heard the soundless music in my mind. I mounted its broad back, shrinking to an acceptable size, and it flew me directly to the far cliffs to reunite me with the path through the water-ribboned landscape. I bowed in thanks to my *simurgh* as it eyed me with respectful indifference, lifted itself almost gracefully into the air and disappeared. I turned to the last stage of my dream journey. The retreat when I arrived was empty, of course, other than for provisions: food, plum wine, ink, paper, brushes and a *qin*. It is perhaps ironic for one to claim that this will suffice, and that one does not ask for much, while having just created paradise in the here and now to cause delight for eternity, but 'irony' is just a word.

Perhaps, while here, I should take a morning to write the *Diamond Sutra* in the sky in invisible calligraphy in order to encourage longevity. But then again, 'longevity' is also just a word.

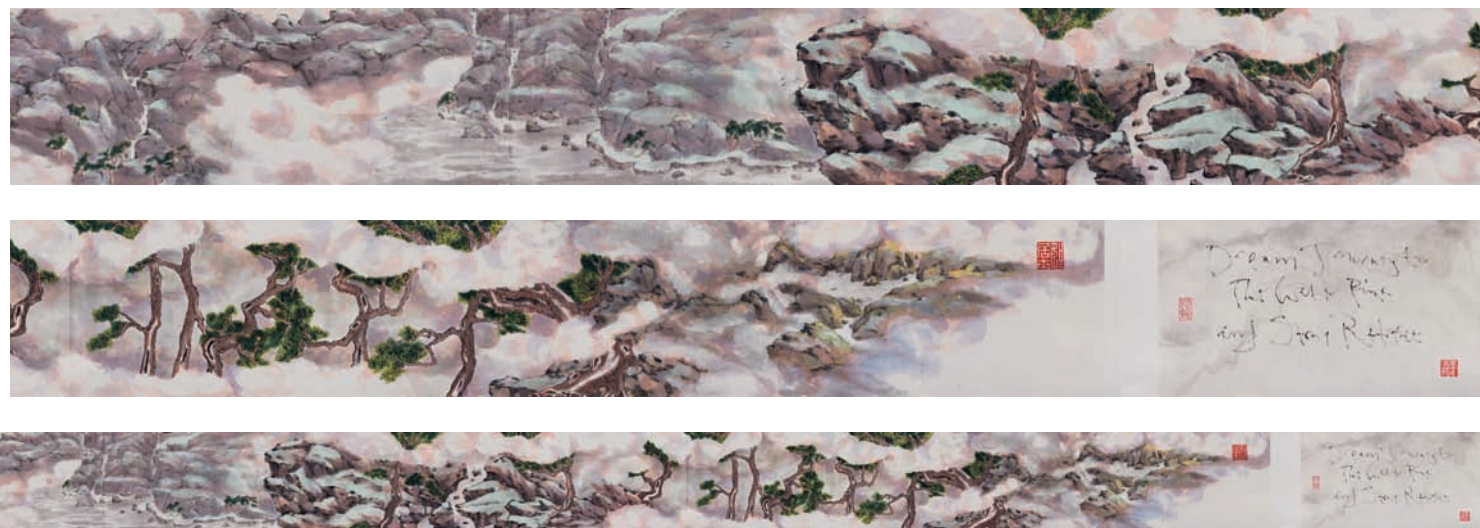
Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the spring of 2020.

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)





AK20.55 *A Strange Affinity*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

186 × 48 cm, Hong Kong, October 2020

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

INSCRIPTION

In the deepest recesses of the psyche there is an affinity between aesthetes and strange stones, walking staves and incense smoke. Realised in the Gorge at either dawn or dusk – it is difficult to tell once time becomes irrelevant.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the late autumn of 2020.

AK21.68 *The Aesthetic of the Enquiring Mind*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
79 × 141 cm, Hong Kong, December 2021

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

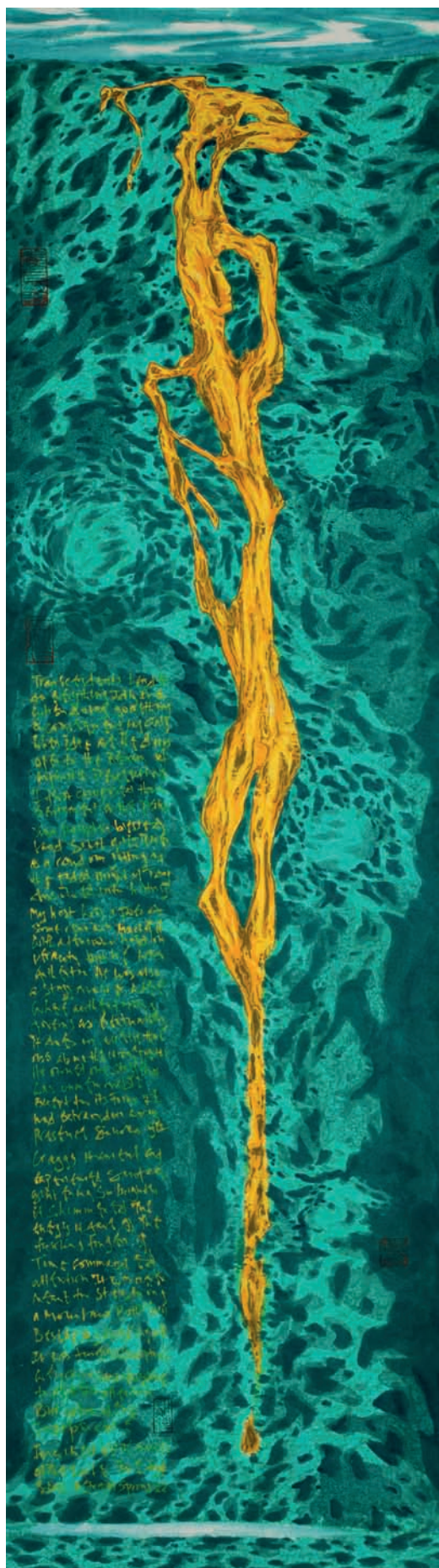
The aesthetic of the enquiring mind is best fulfilled by those who aspire to transcending it. This may be better encouraged in some cultures than in others, but the urge is universal. Transcending the running commentary of the mind in order to gain the perspective to make sense of it all brings common cause to all who aspire. Transcendents are, of course, united beyond the Stage of Time, beyond all fragmenting definition.

Creativity is the key; the most efficient conduit between aspiration and realisation and art, not as object but as process, is one of its purest expressions. The distinction between artist and audience is rendered illusory by full participation in what art *does* and *why* it does it at the highest level. Creativity is the fundamental force in the universe, fuelled by energy. All are unified, aspirati and transcendents, artists and audience, in a quest for self-realisation and fully-evolved consciousness.

If you want to master this process it is useful to begin by being attentive to the more profound aspects of the process of art and to surround yourself with the playthings of the literati, for they are portals, direct and efficient, to the Dao.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the locked-down year of 2021
as Christmas jingles its bells yet again.





AK21.74 *Idle*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper, mounted for framing

147 × 48 cm, Hong Kong, spring 2022

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

Transcendents tend to do everything idly, even when doing something inconsequential.
Only when idle are the doors opened wide to the realm of infinite perception.

I first composed this sentiment as a random jotting in the peaks-and-ponds-blessed lands south of the river as the faded might of Tang dissolved into history. My host was a poet of some renown, much of it with a tenuous hold on veracity, but he was authentic. He was also a staff master, where authenticity governs, as eventually it does in all else that rises above the inconsequential. He owned one staff that was unmemorable except for its form. It had extraordinary presence. Sinuous yet craggy, its ancient and experienced surface glistening so brightly it shimmered. The energy it gave off, the tickling fingers of time, commanded attention. It was never really meant for steadying a mountain path, but beside my host's hearth it was timeless sculpture. Welcoming and rewarding to aesthetic attention but ultimately inexplicable.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, spring '22.

AK21.77 *Primordial Stone*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

123.5 × 69.0 cm, Hong Kong, December 2021

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

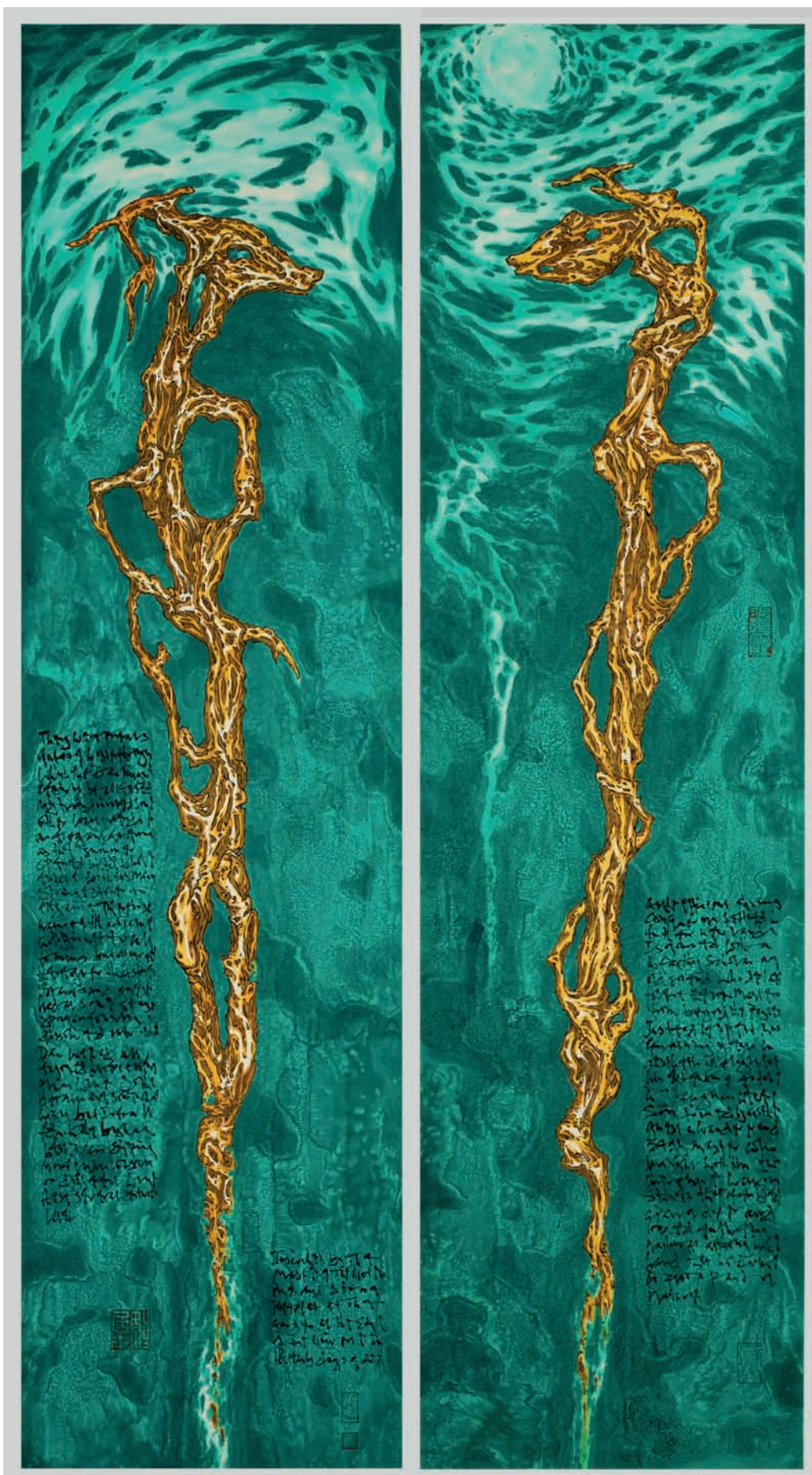
石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

Primordial Stone

Born of creative energy, the universe constantly recreates itself in the sapient mind.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, winter 2021.



AK21.79 *Strolling through the Gates of Wonder*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper, mounted for framing

Two panels, each 177.0 × 47.8 cm, Hong Kong, completed early January 2022

Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

As the efficient Qing conquerors settled into their new lands, I sojourned with a wealthy scholar, an old friend who declined to serve the new masters from beyond the passes. Instead he spent his remaining years in aesthetic delight at his extensive estate in Jiangnan. We were soon joined by another guest, a wanderer and staff master who brought with him two impressive walking staves that resembled a pair of deer and looked entirely natural, although the hand that holds the chisel is also a part of nature. They were portals, Gates of Wonder through which the Dao might readily be accessed. My host invited some other local friends to an elegant gathering as the summer opened up the whole estate, with his many strange stones gathered over the generations, to elegance. The precise nature of the outcome is difficult to call to mind, but all agreed thereafter that stones, staves and guests had at some stage spontaneously dissolved into the Dao. We had all enjoyed his excellent plum wine, so the details are somewhat hazy, but I recall them to the brush as best I can, sipping more judiciously on different wine these several centuries later.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early days of 2022.

AK22.6 *The Power of the Stone*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

177.5 × 96.0 cm, Hong Kong, spring 2022

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

The Power of the Stone

Bowing respectfully to Elder Brother Stone

Madman Mi dissolves into the Dao

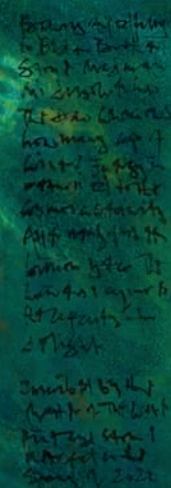
Who knows how many cups of wine?

Energy is returned to the cosmos as creativity

After nearly fourteen billion years

The Universe acquires the capacity for delight

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, spring of 2022.



AK22.43 *Cloud Gatherer at Rest*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper mounted on *xuan* paper

Handscroll, image 44.5 × 281.0 cm, Sussex and Hong Kong, autumn 2022

Consultative joint work with Robin

INSCRIPTION

Title Slip

Cloud Gatherer at Rest

One artist seal

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

Title Panel

Cloud Gatherer at Rest

One artist seal

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

Colophon

This staff was originally depicted vertically, set against a background of the ancient trees from which it might have been made, but as the layers accumulated it began to acquire independent confidence, so it shed its support. Staves can do that. Strolling in the twilight, with hand clutching staff, the cosmos awaits a conductor . . . thaumaturgy. All artists are alchemists in the sense of transforming lower-level materials into higher-level meaning, and in the process, the separate self into the transcendent Self. Cinnabar, the source to feed crucible and alembic in physical alchemy, suggested itself as the final layer. Applied thick, with complete indifference as to outcome, the strong colour crowned the underlying layers of more carefully applied pigments, transforming the image to reach beyond rationality.

In gratitude, inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, in the late summer, early autumn of 2022.

Three artist seals

樂琴書以消永日 *Le qinshu yi xiao yongri*

(Enjoying the *qin* and books to while away the long days)

有意无意 *Youyi wuyi* (Between intention and no intention)

无爲 *Wuwei* (Without action)



Painting

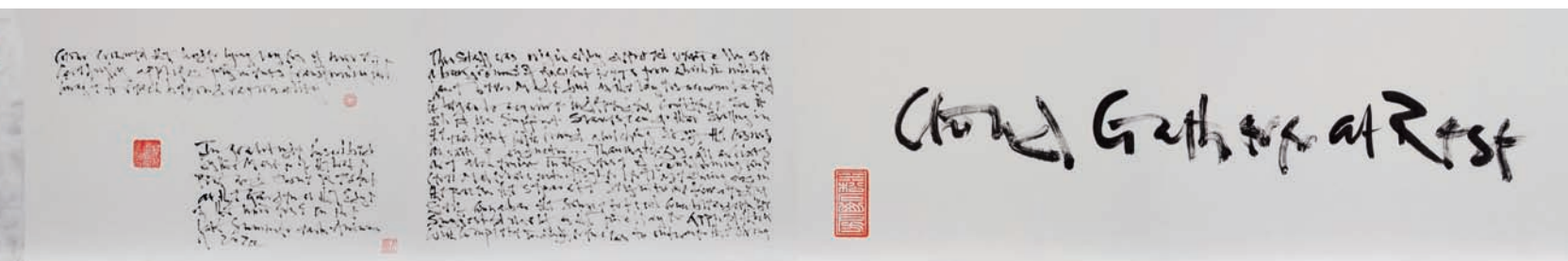
Staves can be corporeal or psychological, real or imagined, central to existence or peripheral, sometimes even entirely without consequence other than to smooth an uneven mountain path. This one is not real in the sense of scientific rationality, but that does not govern art; the mimetic is just one of many options in the vast panoply of aesthetic means. It is real to me because it was part of a joint work created with the help of my son – my hidden treasure, my smile of joyous life, my measure, my constant unassuming surprise.

I could easily write a story about it in the hands of some ancient eremite, lost in the wilderness, beyond the Stage of Time, remaining in consciousness only as a guiding light across time, but there is no need of such embellishments. I shall simply note its name, Cloud Gatherer.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, autumn '22.

Seven artist seals

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)
竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)
山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)
攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)
養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)
石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)





AK22.65 *Steadfast Companions*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

167.0 × 36.7 cm, Hong Kong, December 2022

Two artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

INSCRIPTION

The stone outside my wilderness retreat awaits with the patience of indifference the arrival of another steadfast companion to entwine with the ancient pine for support as the centuries slip by.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe at the end of the fruitful year of 2022.

AK23.7 *One Two Three*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

Triptych, each sheet 142 × 79 cm, Hong Kong, February 2023

Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

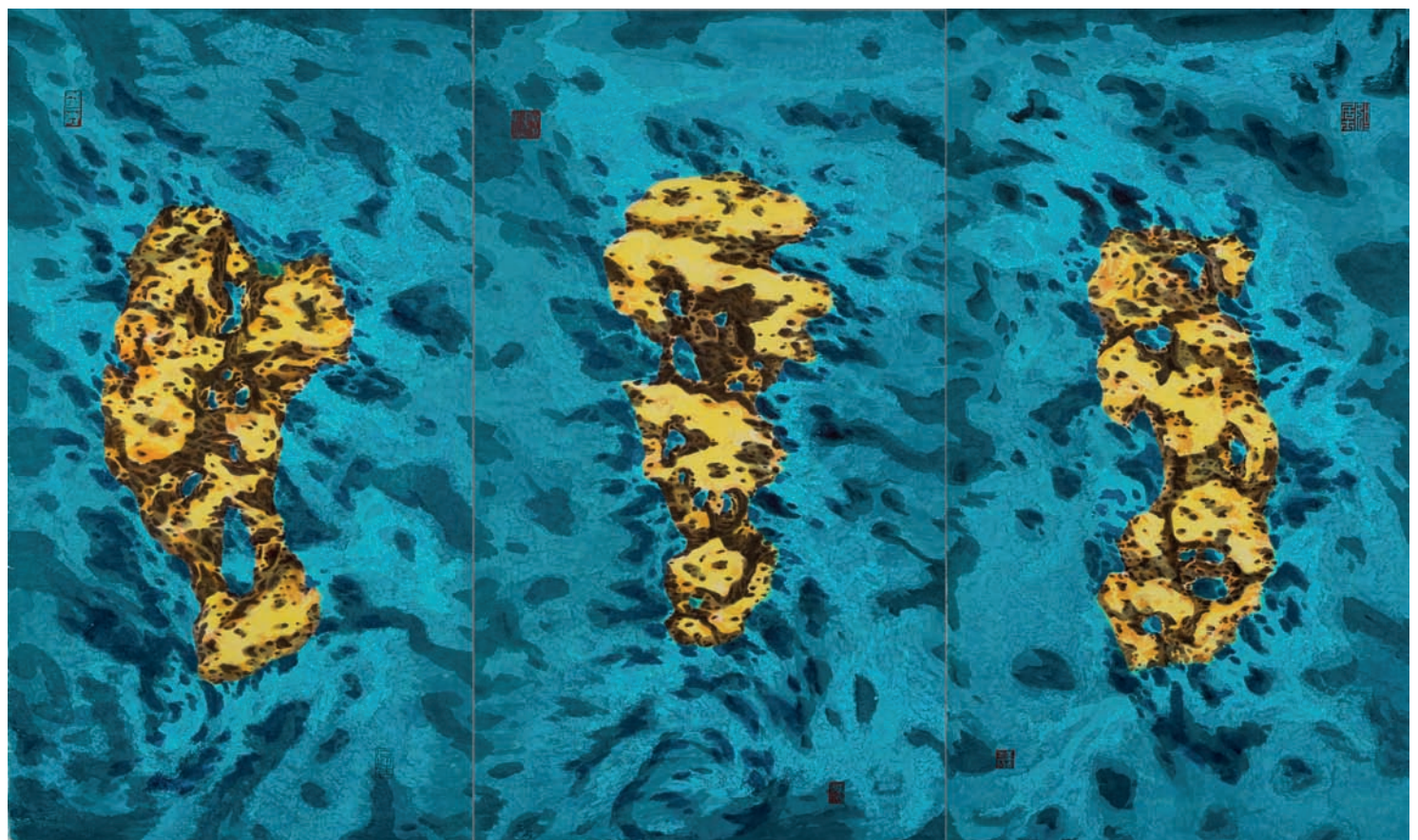
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

樂琴書以消永日 *Le qinshu yi xiao yongri* (Enjoying the *qin* and books to while away the long days)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

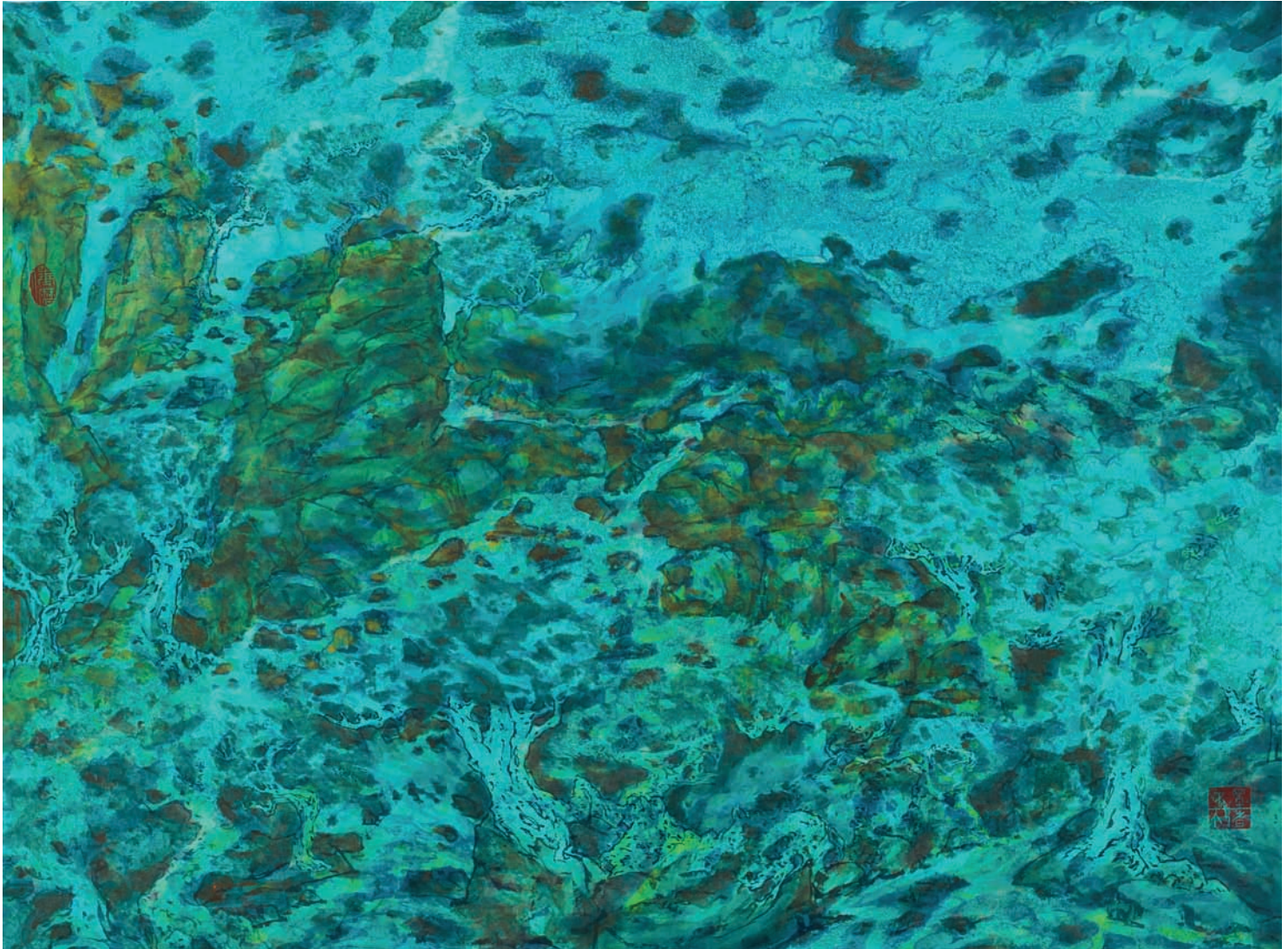


AK23.22 *Dawn Haze on the Isles of the Immortals*
Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper
67.5 × 95.5 cm, Hong Kong, March 2023

Two artist seals

墨磨人 Momoren (Ink grinds the man)

墨者不朽 Mozhe buxiu (Let ink be my immortality)



AK23.25 *The Peaches of Immortality*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

Handscroll, 24.5 × 175.0 cm, Hong Kong, April 2023

INSCRIPTION

Title panel

The Peaches of Immortality

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat.

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

Painting

Two artist seals

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

Colophon

The Peaches of Immortality are said to grow in the garden of the Queen Mother and fruit only once every three thousand years. But for immortals they are, of course, entirely unnecessary. They are a myth invented as part of the interface between the Dao and the religion that arises out of it; their purpose, to render the mystery more accessible to the mystified. But there is no mystery in the Dao, only on the path to it.

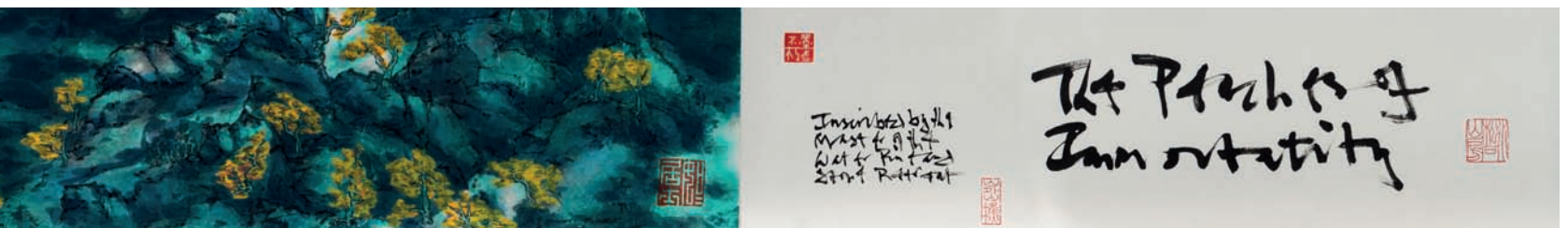
At the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, in the spring of 2023.

Three artist seals

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)





AK23.26 *Shannon Falls*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper
204 × 24 cm, Hong Kong, April 2023

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

AK23.30 *Entwined Companions*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper
137.0 × 69.5 cm, Hong Kong, May 2023

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

Ancient pine innocent of the woodcutter's axe
Twisted ranks of bark serried by time
Strange stone perforated by the ages
Risen from the deep before time existed
Steadfast companions of the wilderness
Indifferent to time

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
on an idle day enjoyed at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe
in the cloud-drifting spring of 2023.



AK23.35 *The Homunculi of Consciousness*

Ink and watercolour on Arches paper and wood, with passport photograph of my father
115.5 × 103.5 cm, Sussex, 2021–22, finished July 2023

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

Flying cranes [pictorial]

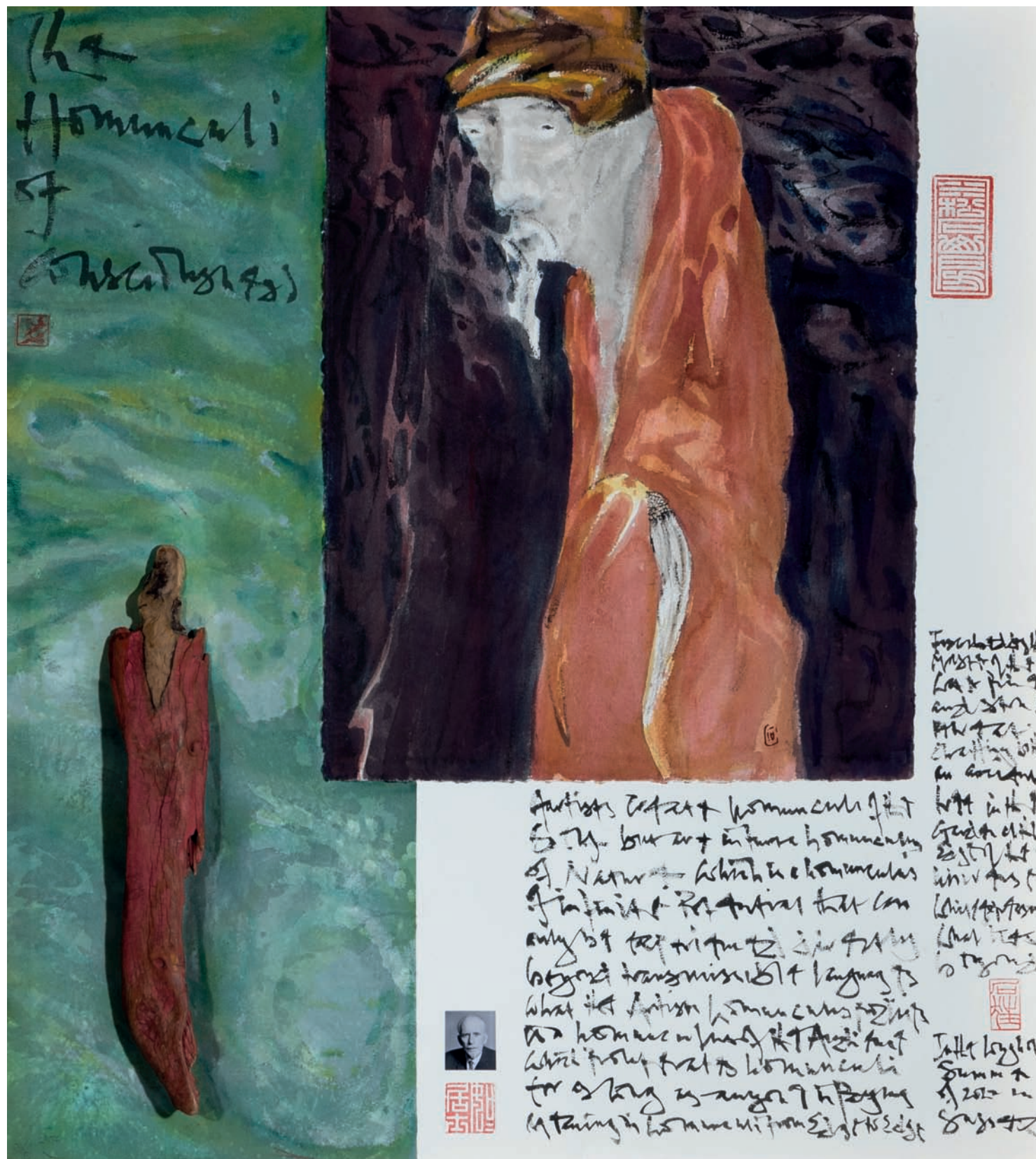
石 *Shi* (Stone) [painted]

INSCRIPTION

The Homunculi of Consciousness

Artists create homunculi of the self but are in turn homunculi of Nature which is a homunculus of infinite potential that can only be experienced directly beyond transmissible languages. What the artist's homunculus produces is a homunculus of the audience which proliferates homunculi for as long as anyone is paying [attention]. Meaning is homunculi from edge to edge.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
chatting with an ancient tree in the Garden at the Edge of the Universe
while expressing what lies beyond.





AK23,36 *One into Three*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

185 × 95 cm, Sussex, July 2023

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

COMMENTARY

[Not inscribed on the painting]

Reality is the result of creativity fuelled by energy. To mimic the result focuses on lower levels of meaning in art, which is not where the wondrous communication in art awaits; that is just where it starts. Painting the energy allows me to weave a fabric of layer after layer of patterns in various diluted colours, each intermingled and dancing with those that went before. With each work, the circle of creativity is completed; knowing consciousness is the only entity in the universe we can be certain of that can bring recognition and delight to billions of years of mindless cosmic creativity.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the summer of 2023.

AK23.42 *Within the Stone Distinction Evaporates*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
97 × 185 cm, Sussex, August 2023

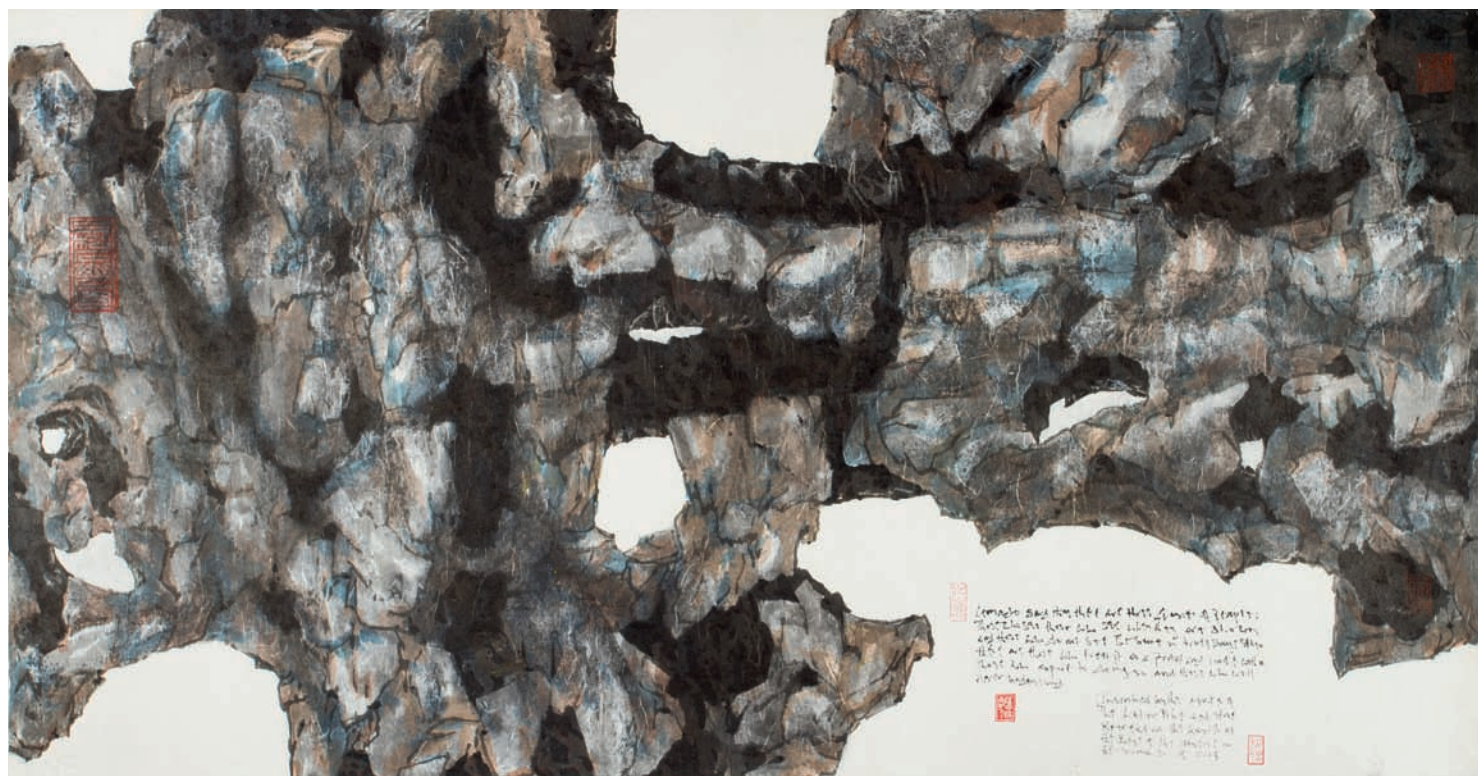
Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)
如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)
山外山樵 *Shanwai shangqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)
竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)
攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)
石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

Leonardo said that there are three classes of people: those who see, those who see when they are shown, those who do not see. The same is true of a strange stone: there are those who treat it as a portal and unite with it, those who aspire to doing so, and those who will never understand.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the summer of 2023.



AK23,51 *Dancing with Time*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper mounted on *xuan* paper

181 × 97 cm, Sussex, September 2023

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

INSCRIPTION

From the moment we are born we dance with time. As a child it seems endless; vague, fleeting fears about how it might end barely apply to innocence. As we grow older and the years shorten, apprehension knows we care and edges its way in as we consider how to fill the incremental hours as they accelerate past us. We begin to deal with it philosophically; time acquires both presence and absence.

The absence of time touches upon both death and immortality. How we see the end of time depends upon our bandwidth of consciousness. Locked into the rational, reasoning faculties of intellect (the separate self with its ticking clock), we can fill the hours to tame our fear, reach for the skirts of immortality through what we contribute to civilisation, create a panacea for the separate self, a sticking plaster on the eternal gaping wound of ego. Death is inevitable, but insignificant if we are no longer a separate, limited fragment of the universe as defined by intellect. Step beyond the self, beyond the intellect, beyond the fragments and limits, experience the full bandwidth of consciousness, and we step off the Stage of Time. Then we become immortal in a luminous moment as we step through the Gates of Wonder. Then self, and all its concerns, all its gods, all its rules and social pretensions, evaporate into immortality in the blinking of an eye. Beyond the Stage of Time there is no separate self, no difference between a second and eternity. No doubt, nothing left to fear.

Like any art form, strange stones are a portal. Religion, philosophy and science are also portals to an inexplicable way of knowing. The conclusions they come to only govern at a lower level in explaining the inexplicable. Conquering time, uniting with the realm of knowing where language has no absolute meaning, we return home to harmony.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, beyond the significance of 'edge'.

AK24.3 *Reifying the Primordial Stone*

Ink, gum arabic and watercolour on *xuan* paper

132.0 × 76.6 cm, Sussex and Hong Kong, January 2024

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shangqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

石 *Shi* (Stone)

INSCRIPTION

Permanence

Deep aspiration of self-consciousness

Seeks eternity of spirit

Whether deep inside

Or outsourced to the gods

We attempt to outwit mortality

Whichever route we choose

We build its metaphors in stone

Portals to transcendence

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, January 2024.



AK24.4 *The Cinnabar Stone of the Master of the Pot*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

184 × 99 cm, Sussex and Hong Kong, Christmas 2023 and early spring 2024

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

INSCRIPTION

In the world of red dust, strange stones rise elegantly from *zitan* stands as objects of aesthetic delight. They calm the mind that reaches for brush or *qin* to reify the inexplicable. Drifting smoke from an ancient censer seeks their crevasses like clouds, *simurghs* to transport the stone fool over unnavigable waters, on which even a feather cannot float, protecting the Isle of the Immortals. But Penglai, though shrouded from vulgar view, is accessible to ordinary understanding; other more mysterious realms lie beyond, obscured by pentachromatic clouds, inaccessible to perception. Like Fusang, cinnabar stones exist as elastic paradox in otherworldly realms known only to those who would be released from the corruptible body before its dissolution. Cinnabar stones are the embryonic harbingers of immortality, primal pneuma, original creative spirit of highest clarity, existing only in the mind and in the realm of the brush. In the phenomenal world they are just ground to dust to be transformed in the alembic of reason into the essential ingredient of elixirs. Who knows how many emperors and other fools have died of ingesting supposed potions of immortality?

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, basking in the boon of luminescence
as the brush dances with clouds and dragons in the early spring of 2024.

AK24.13 *Homage to the Ink Master*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper with collage on Liu Kuo-sung paper
188 × 98 cm, Hong Kong, March 2024

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

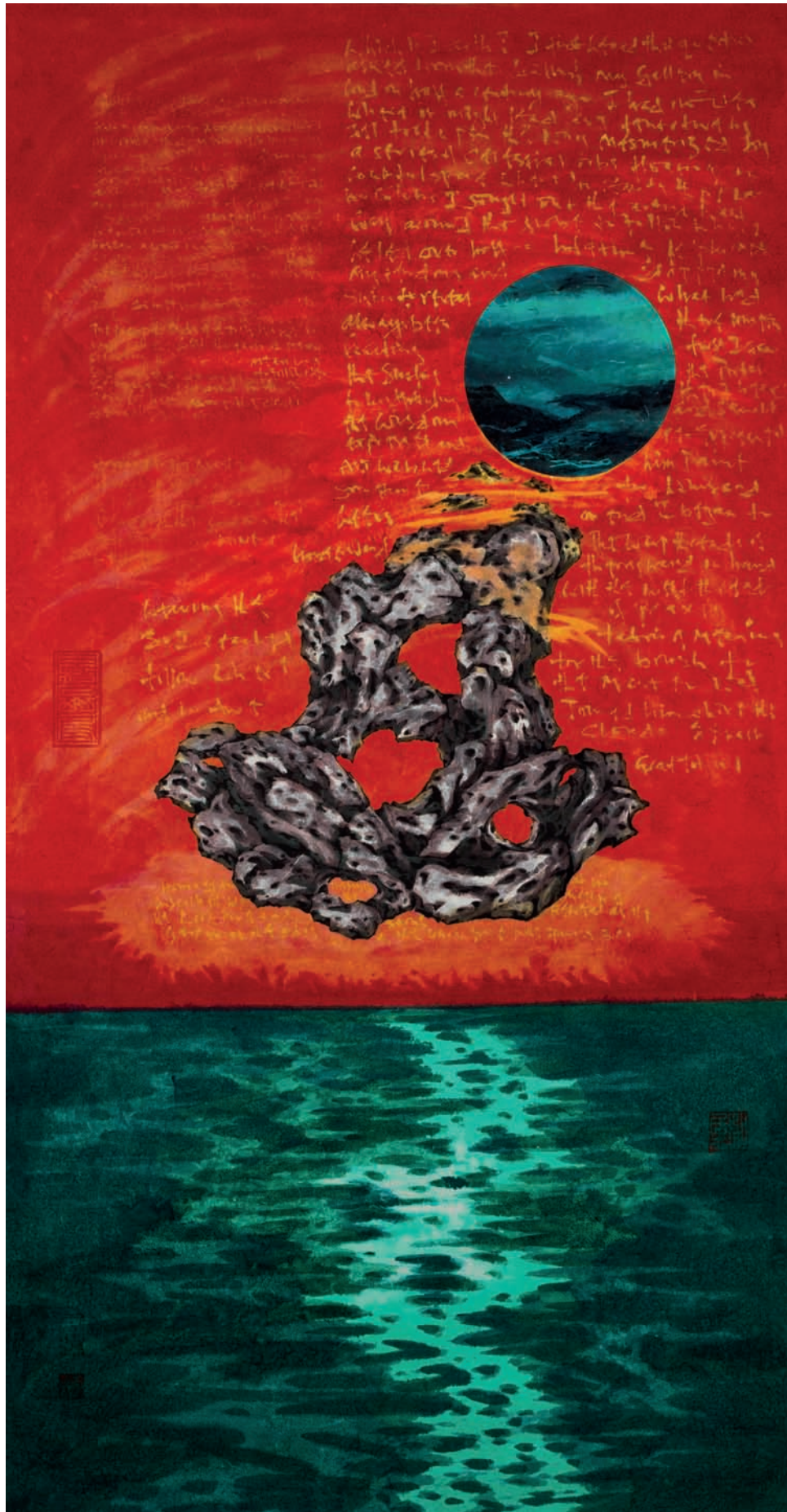
石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

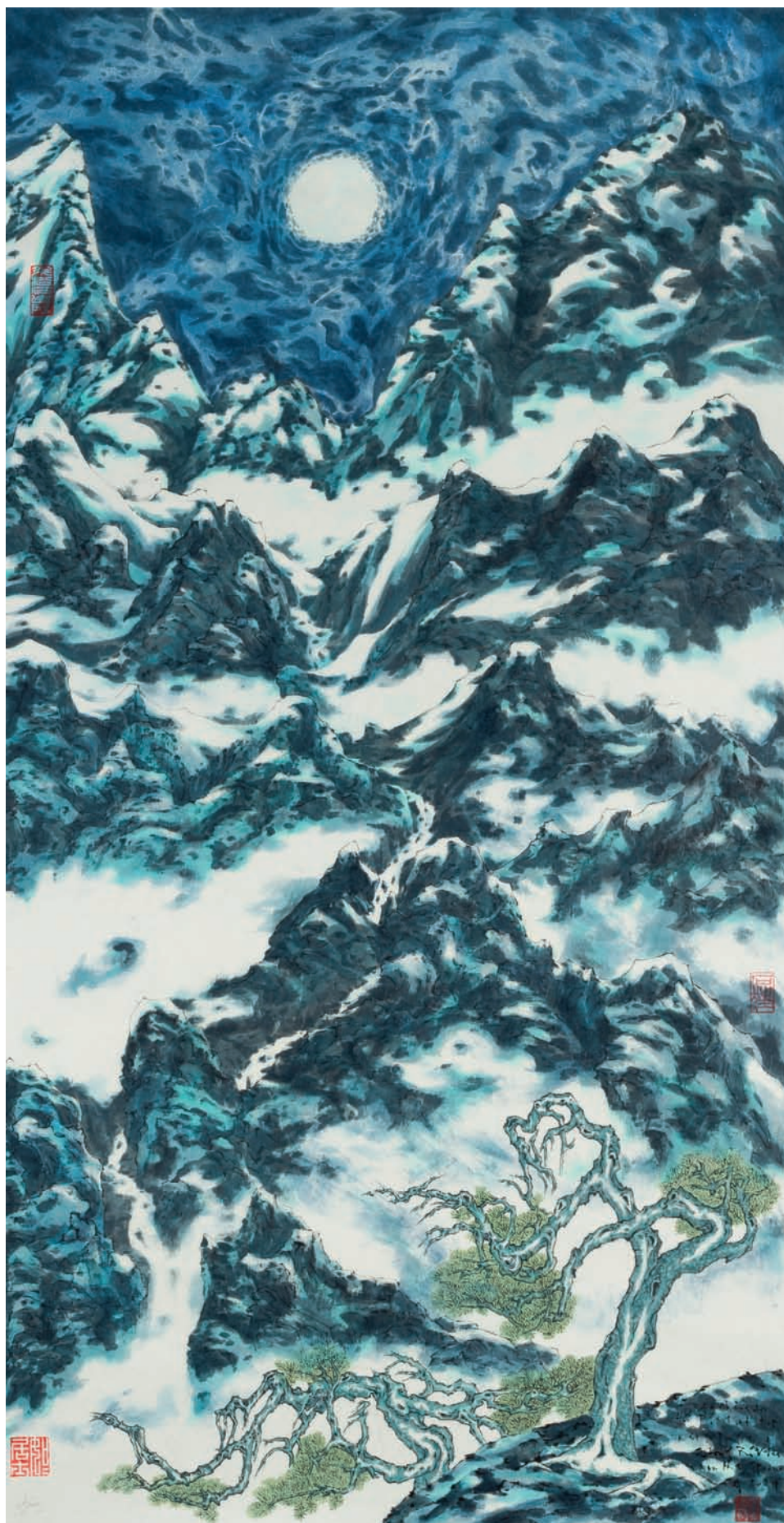
INSCRIPTION

Which is Earth? I first heard this question asked from the walls of my gallery in London half a century ago. I had no idea where it would lead as I tentatively set foot upon the way. Mesmerised by a series of paintings of celestial orbs floating in the colourful space that in reality has no colour, I sought out the artist halfway around the globe to follow where he led. Over half a lifetime, he 'plucked my tendons and stripped my skin' to reveal what had always been there, unseen, waiting. First I saw the surface, the portal to understanding; then I heard the wisdom and saw it expressed and re-expressed as I watched him paint, sometimes for hours and weeks on end. I began to understand the warp threads of theory hand in hand with the weft threads of praxis weaving the fabric of meaning. So I reached for the brush to follow where the master led, and in awe joined him above the clouds, eternally grateful.

Homage to the Master of Ink

inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the spring of 2024.





AK24.20 *Reaching for the Pearl*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

188.0 × 98.5 cm, Hong Kong, April 2024

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

Reaching for the pearl at the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, April 2024.

AK24.48 *Back to Wilderness*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

77 × 140 cm, Hong Kong, May 2024

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shangqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

INSCRIPTION

As the Ming began its inevitable decline, as ever I retired to the wild, returning to an ideal spot I had enjoyed long ago. Most of the ancient trees I recalled were gone and what remained of my retreat was barely visible among the moss-covered rocks and scree fringing the lake. Fish remained plentiful and undisturbed and the cranes, deer and some wild goats were fearless enough, so I rebuilt my ancient home on the remnants of a few of the larger stilts still embedded in the shallows. Then I began to plant and nurture fresh pines. Eventually, after many seasons had passed, it is difficult to take time seriously beyond its stage, I was drawn back to a small hamlet in the foothills, only a day or two away from a larger urban centre, with companionship and the tempting availability of fine paper, ink and brushes.

Nearly a lifetime by normal standards elapsed before I returned to find my pine trees mature and settled into the landscape; so much so that even the ramshackle remains of my old home seemed an intrusion, so I removed them, right down to the stilts on which it had stood, and over the whole of one summer burned the wood to keep warm on cool nights and cook food. Lake carp never tasted better. As autumn chills began to seep into my bones, I left, but carried with me the image of my summer sojourn. These many years later I recall it to the brush, the only remaining sign of my ever having been there.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early summer of 2024.



AK24.75 *On the Other Side of Time*

Ink and watercolour on *xuan* paper

90 × 165 cm, Sussex and Hong Kong, summer 2024

Joint work with Robin, who painted the initial abstract layers

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)



AK24.79 *Water, Pine and Stone Conversation*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
78 × 101 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

INSCRIPTION

Convoluted stones make the moon a guest. Ancient pines invite mournful wind to sigh its song through dancing branches, bringing the crystal chatter of the falls as distant flutes.

While asleep, Zeng Gongliang heard beneath his bed the sad soughing pines and saw the clouds of myriad peaks as he feared to open his window in case a mighty river surged through. Jing Hao needed neither wind nor pines to hear the lingering whisper of their song. Wang Wei, stalwart companion beyond the Stage of Time, tuned the sounds to chirruping birds and chanting friends. Surely it is the sound of the *qin* I hear? No, it is the symphony of the wilderness.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe with brush and ink as my orchestra
as I journey into wonder as autumn clads the distant Nodding Stone Garden
with raiment of gold and cinnabar, November 2024.





AK24.90 *Water, Pine and Stone Retreat Conversation, No.4*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

143 × 79 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

INSCRIPTION

I have sat gazing into the infinite vistas from the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat (once one has excused mundane reality, that is) so long that personality is no longer a necessary presence. Uniting with strange stones, ancient pines and the eternal chatter of friendly falls seems a more revealing self-portrait, which is a relief, since personality, while essential in order to ponder its essence, can be tiresome as one's only companion. By becoming the water, the pines, the stones, one steps beyond the world of fragments, of distinction, of difference, to become the cosmos and create it anew.

In the domain of metaphor in the attempts of the intellect to subsume what lies beyond its reach, Ouroboros serves – the snake eating its own tail to represent the endless cycle of meaning. In the world beyond the fragmentation of metaphor, meaning exists but as undifferentiated unity beyond the words – beyond 'beyond', but that cannot be grasped by the intellect, nor taught, it can only be directly experienced. Only the path can be taught. Which is why the dao as a path is wholly different from the Dao as its destination. I am not a Daoist; to define oneself as such seems ultimately an ironic negation of the concept. I am the Dao – No Thing. Unless, of course, I am deluded, and in that case I am nothing. A matter of semantics that has no impact on reality. Meanwhile, beneath the exploring brush I have made myself disappear.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

dancing with meaning at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the winter of '24.

AK24.93 *Song of the Wilderness*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

143 × 79 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

Flying cranes [pictorial]

INSCRIPTION

The weft threads of the world, fed eternally by snow and rain, weave their way into the fabric of the wilderness, shaping and decorating it with relentless indifference to time or terrain. Nature as sculptress, carving stone with the chisel of infinite patience. Sages seek the wilderness, far from the clanking urban bustle of purpose and expectation; whether literally or in the quiet of the studio with brush and ink, or gazing at one of nature's sculptured stones – all portals to other worlds, external or internal. I grind the ink and hold the brush, while the wilderness paints itself as the timeless dance of creativity reveals secret realms newly realised.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the gathering winter of 2024.

AK24.94 *Last Pines in the Gorge*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

143 × 79 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* (Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man)

有意无意 *Youyi wuyi* (Between intention and no intention)

INSCRIPTION

Last pines in the wilderness
Clinging, lifeless, to bare stone;
Calligraphic expressions of fallibility
Silhouetted against the falls,
Snowmelt- and rain-fed,
Singing still to ears long deaf
In a mindless world

But that is just the surface meaning, the ephemera that emerge during the largely random process of exploring depth, essence, the inner abstraction and alchemy of the process. Disappearing into the wilderness, then uniting with it beyond distinction, pines become dragons inviting me to join them in their eternal dance of existence.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe as winter returns to bring closure to 2024.

AK24.98 *Water, Pine and Stone Retreat Conversation, No.10*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

78.7 × 71.0 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Three artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

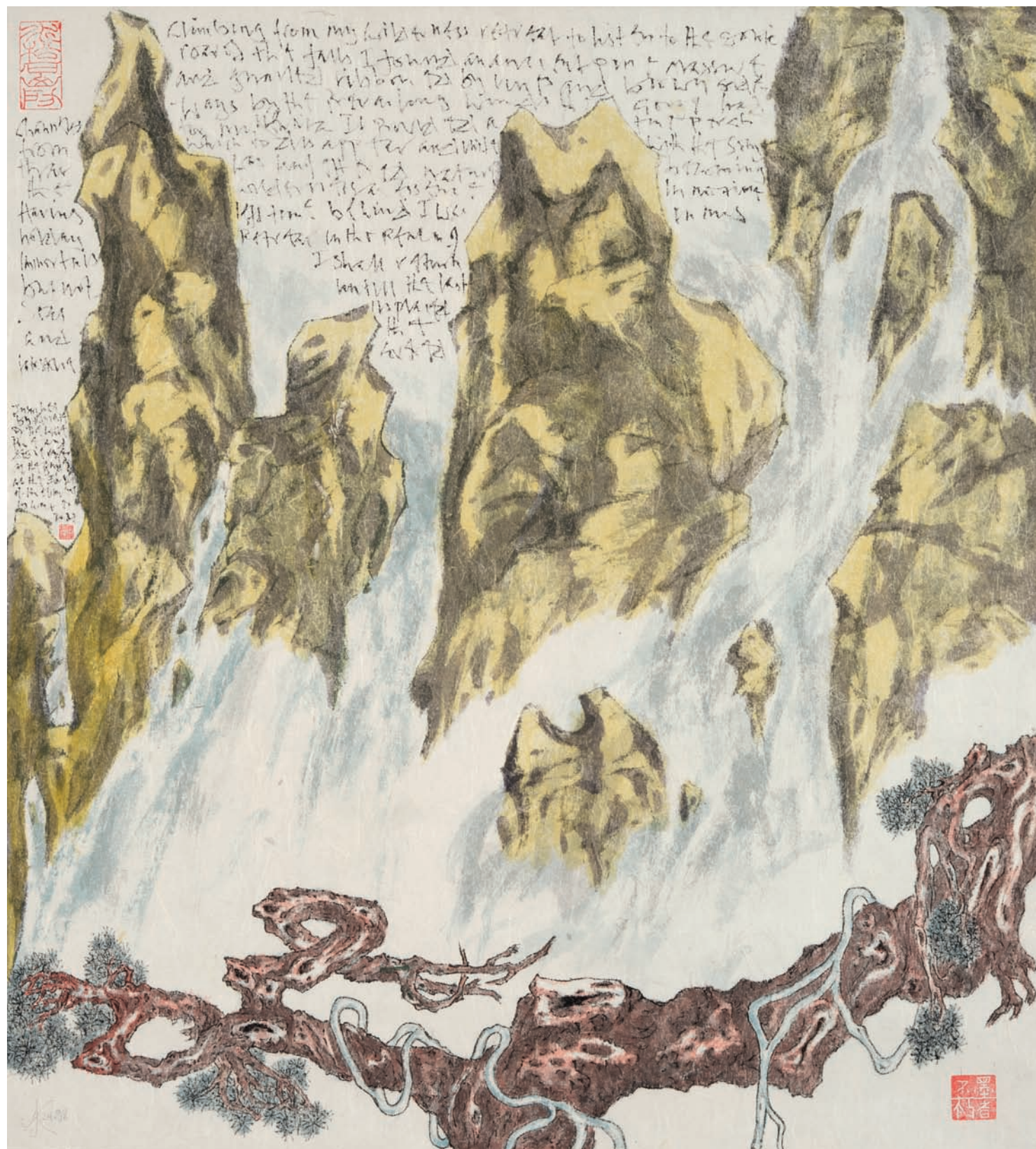
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

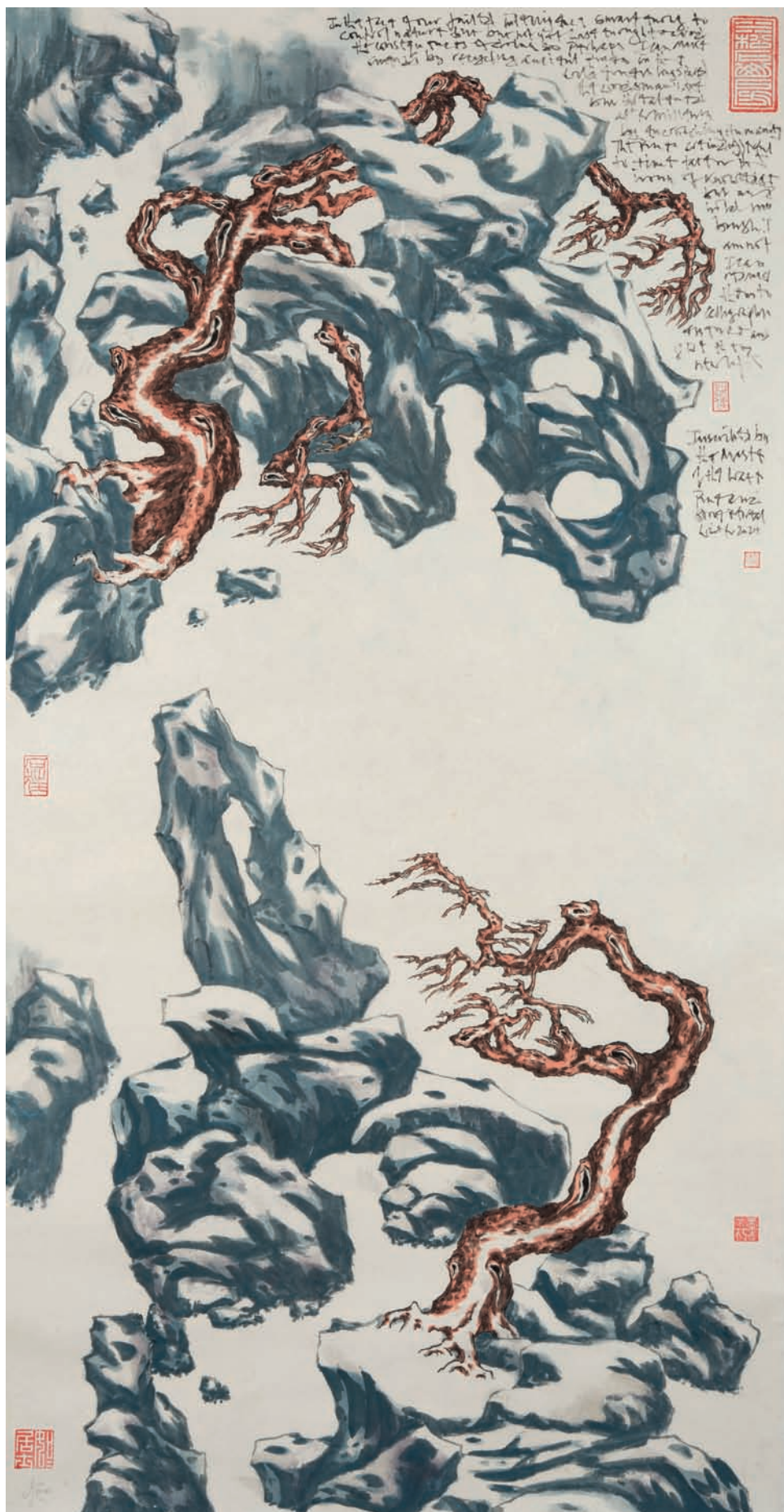
士撫 *Shihui* [name]

INSCRIPTION

Climbing from my wilderness retreat to listen to the sonic roar of the falls, I found an ancient pine, massive and gnarled, ribboned by vines, blown sideways by the prevailing wind the gorge had channelled for millennia. It provided a fine perch from which to disappear and unite with the song that was unfettered nature, becoming the wilderness as essence. In no time, having left time behind, I was in my holiday retreat in the realm of immortals. I shall return, but not until the last seal is placed and the inkstone covered.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in winter of 2024.





AK24.IO2 *Water, Pine and Stone Conversation, No.11*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

190 × 98 cm, Hong Kong, December 2024

Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

In the face of our failed intelligence, smart enough to control nature but not yet wise enough to avoid the consequences of doing so, perhaps I can make amends by recycling ancient pines in the wilderness, long spared the woodsman's axe but threatened after millennia by encroaching humanity. The pines are indifferent to time, fate or the irony of knowledge, but as I hold the brush, I am not. I can reduce them to calligraphic essence and give them new life.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, winter 2024.

AK24.106 *Water, Pine and Stone Conversation, No.15*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

188 × 97 cm, Hong Kong, December 2024

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

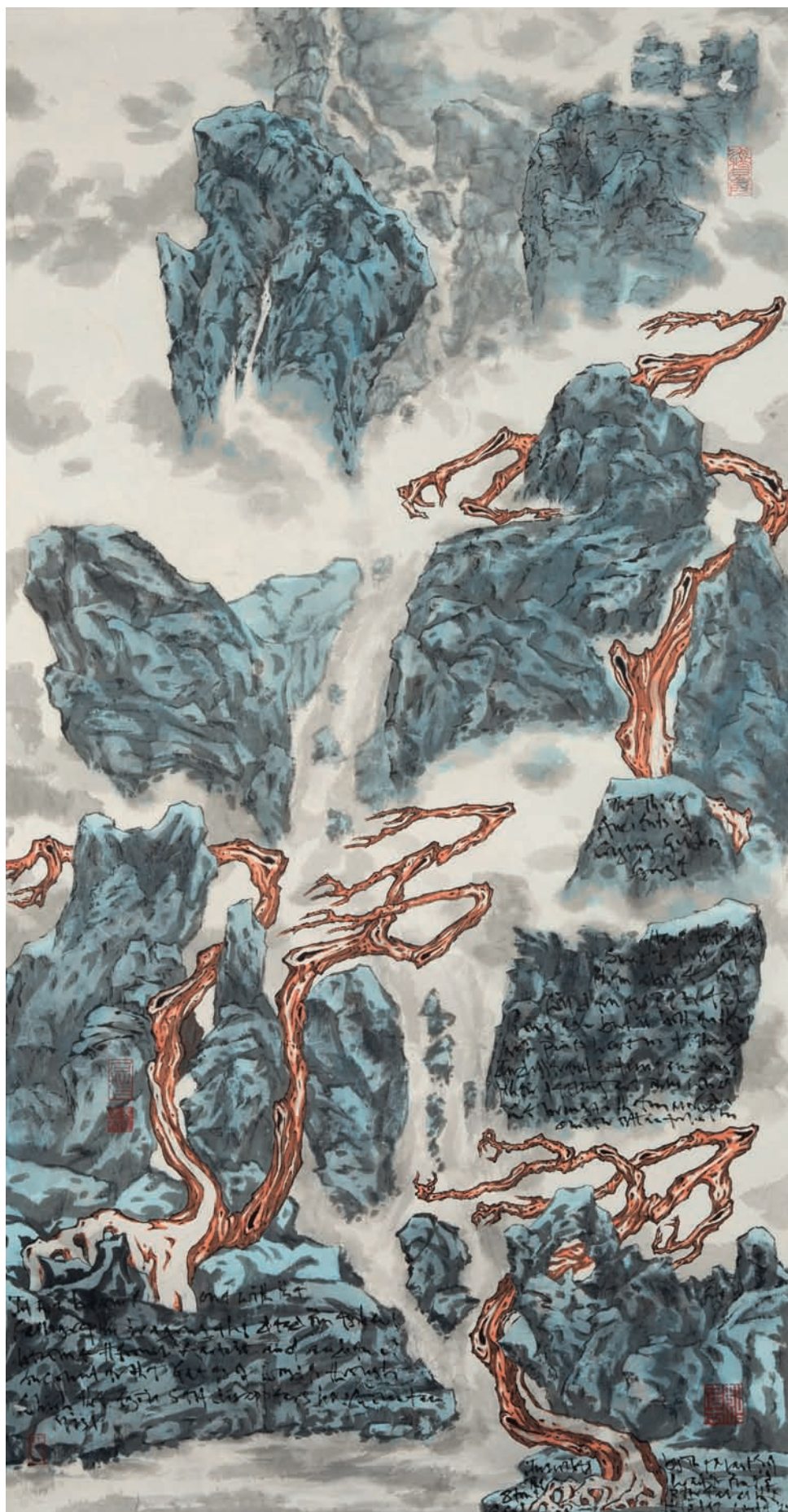
INSCRIPTION

The last of their foliage fallen
The lifeless roots of ancient pines search still
On the bare cliffs of the wilderness
No longer for scarce nutrients
But for a last tenuous grip
In the crags and crevices of existence
In inhospitable peaks

Trees are indifferent to time
Life and death have no meaning
They embody the Dao
They are as they are until change occurs
And they rejoin the dust of a dusty world
So I breathe life back into them
Transformed into calligraphic dragons

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the winter of 2024.





AK24.109 *Clinging to Indifference*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

186 × 98 cm, Hong Kong, winter 2024

Five artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

INSCRIPTION

The Three Ancients of Crying Gibbons Gorge have been dead since I first met them above my wilderness retreat long ago, but it bothers them not. Pines have no feelings. Indifferent to time and senses, their feelings are only those that we bring to them, more for ourselves than for them. If we become one with the calligraphic dragons the dead pines have become, hermit, artist and audience encounter the Gates of Wonder through which the egoic self disappears like mountain mist.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
at the Garden at the Edge, winter '24.

AK25.1 *Water, Pine and Stone Conversation, No.18*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

141 × 78 cm, Hong Kong, January 2025

Six artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shangqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

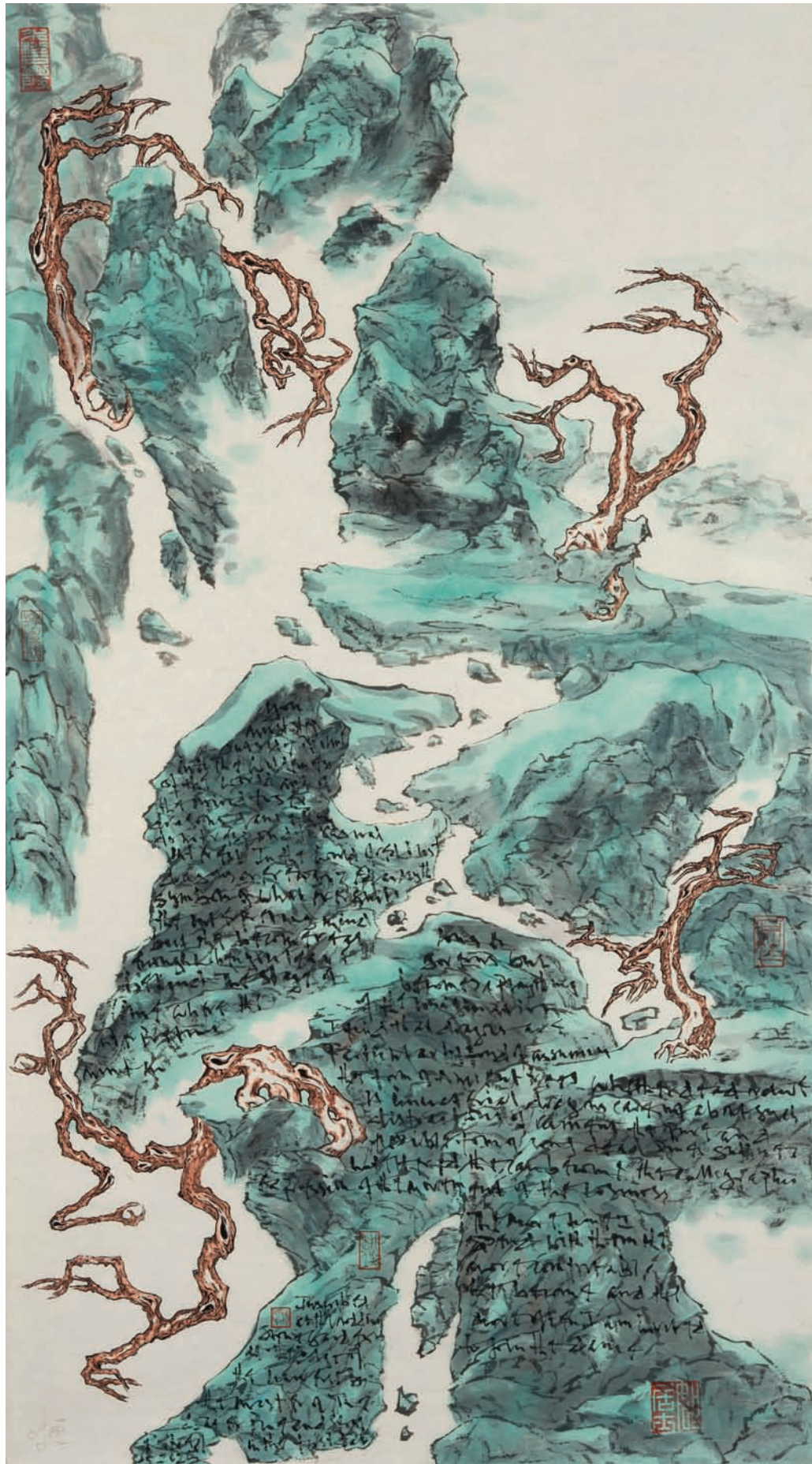
如如居士 *Ruru Jushi* (Retired scholar who believes all doctrines equal)

石狂 *Shikuang* (Stone fool)

INSCRIPTION

You must step outside of time, into the wilderness of the world and of the mind to see dragons dance. They do not respond to casual interest. In the world of red dust dragons are recognised as myth, symbols of whatever suits the interpreting mind, but they become real enough when you leave behind the Stage of Time where the interpreting mind no longer governs but becomes a plaything of the imagination. I find that dragons are particularly fond of assuming the form of ancient trees, whether dead or alive is immaterial, dragons care not about such distractions as raiment; the pure and flexible form of long-dead pines suffices. Unfettered, they can become the calligraphic expression of the movement of the cosmos. The more time I spend with them the more comfortable they become and the more often I am invited to join the dance.

Inscribed at the Nodding Stone Garden at the Edge of the Universe
by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in the first days of 2025.





AK25.2 *Entwined*

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper

192 × 78 cm, Hong Kong, January 2025

Four artist seals

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* (Old man who carries the staff)

山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* (Mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains)

INSCRIPTION

Entwined

Interdependent

Stone pine

Entwined

Synergistic

Ink paper

Entwined

Reciprocal

Vision expression

Entwined

Complementary

Artist audience

Entwined

Exploration

Quest destination

Indivisible

Realisation

Self Absolute

Painting the Dao with Three Perfections

at the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in the New Year.

AK25.41 *Strange Events at the Nodding Stone Garden*

Ink and watercolour on Arches paper, wooden box

Eleven sheets, each 19.5 × 29.0 cm, completed in Sussex, July 2025

Twelve artist seals

虚静觀復道人 *Xujing guanfu Daoren*

(Man of the Dao who observes the return of all things to emptiness and quietude)

石石 *Shishi* (Stones)

養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* (Idler who cherishes stones)

士搗 *Shihui* [name]

誠 *Cheng* (Sincere)

无爲 *Wuwei* (Without action)

水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* (Water, Pine and Stone Retreat)

Flying cranes [pictorial]

石 *Shi* (Stone)

竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* (Old man as empty inside as bamboo)

意外之喜 *Yiwai zhixi* (Happy accident)

墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* (Let ink be my immortality)

INSCRIPTION

Title Panel

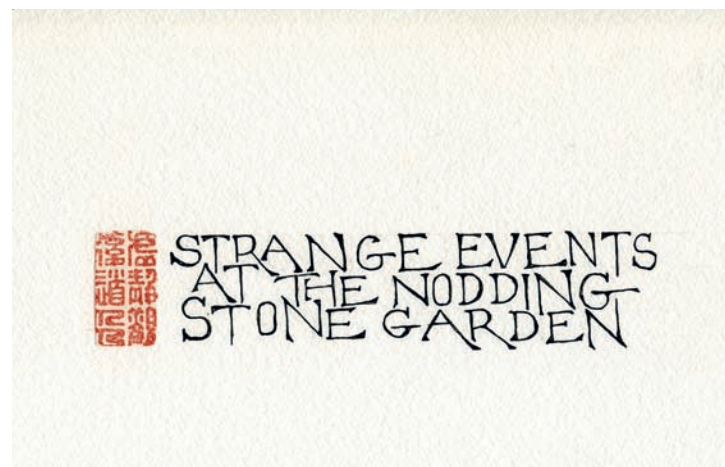
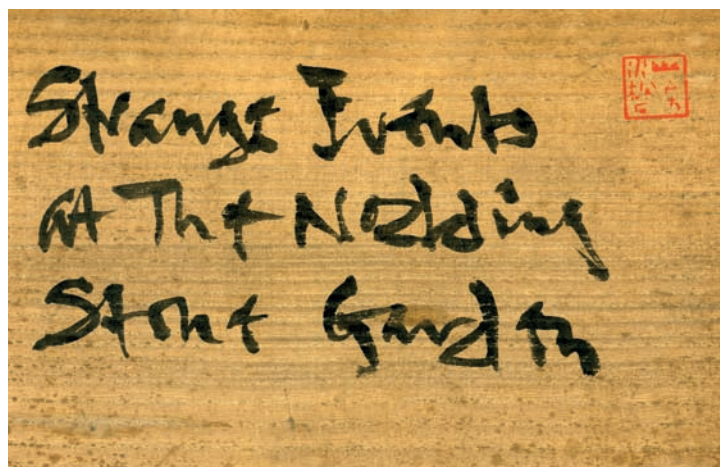
Strange Events at the Nodding Stone Garden

Painting

I first encountered the Daoist of the Pot in a marketplace in Wuxi; I never knew his real name. Set out on his table were gourds, herbs, elixirs and a variety of small strange stones, pebbles and pieces of oddly-shaped wood. I was admiring them when he asked what use I had for such things. 'I might ask the same of you,' I replied. 'I have no use for them,' was his response. 'I sell them, that is all. But others who do have a use for them will buy them.' I asked him if they would disappear into his gourds or strange stones and transcend the dusty world. He burst out laughing, and walking around his table took me by the arm. 'You are obviously a man of the Way and I would enjoy your company. I have a retreat a day's journey from here, if you care to join me.' I readily agreed and we set out immediately. I asked him whether he didn't want to take his wares with him. 'No need,' he replied. 'They will find their way into the right hands one way or another.' We soon found a ride much of the way on a horse-drawn cart going west into the rugged hills beyond Hangzhou, then set off from the main road on foot, climbing steadily through the trees.

His home was a ramshackle affair, made up of whatever materials he could add to an abandoned hut he had stumbled across long ago. Set beside a brook, with fruit trees and vegetables once planted but now left to their own devices, he ushered me inside to find a large flat stone rising out of the ground, dividing the interior into two, with a simple wall of woven bamboo on one side, beyond which was a pallet as his bed. He offered me the other side of the fireplace, set in a natural hearth in the centre of the great stone, and dragged an old mattress stuffed with dried and shredded bamboo leaves from the dark recess behind his bed to serve as mine. Then he lit the fire and set about preparing a simple but delicious meal in an ancient wok.

Tucked in amongst the pines and other trees behind his retreat were eight of the most spectacular stones I had seen for a while, too large for the painting table but ideal for a garden. The space around them was strangely carefully tended compared to his home and immediate surrounds.



I FIRST ENCOUNTERED THE DUST OF THE POT IN A MARKET PLACE IN WUXI. I NEVER KNEW HIS REAL NAME. SET OUT ON HIS TABLE WERE GOURDS, HERBS, ELIXIRS AND A VARIETY OF SMALL STRANGE STONES, PEBBLES AND PIECES OF ODDLY SHAPED WOOD. I WAS ADMIRING THEM HE ASKED WHAT USE I HAD FOR SUCH THINGS. I MIGHT ASK THE SAME OF YOU, HE REPLIED. I HAVE NO USE FOR THEM, WAS HIS RESPONSE. I TELL THEM THAT IS ALL BUT OTHERS WHO DO HAVE A USE FOR THEM, WILL BUY THEM. I ASKED HIM IF THIS WOULD DISAPPEAR INTO HIS GOURDS OR STRANGE STONES AND TRANSCEND THE DUSTY WORLD. HE BURST OUT LAUGHING AND WALKING AROUND HIS TABLE TOOK ME BY THE ARM. YOU ARE OBVIOUSLY A MAN OF THE LAW AND I WOULD ENJOY YOUR COMPANY. I HAVE A RETREAT A DAY'S JOURNEY FROM HERE. IF YOU CARE TO JOIN ME, I READILY AGREED AND WE SET OUT IMMEDIATELY. I ASKED HIM IF HE DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE HIS WARES WITH HIM. NO NEED, HE REPLIED. THEY WILL FIND THEIR WAY INTO THE RIGHT HANDS ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. WE SOON FOUND A RIDE MUCH OF THE WAY ON A HORSE-DRAWN CART GOING WEST INTO THE RUGGED HILLS BEYOND HANGZHOU. THEN SET OFF FROM THE MAIN ROAD ON FOOT, CLIMBING STEADILY AMONG THE TREES.

HIS HOME WAS A DANSHAOGLU FARM, MADE UP OF WHATEVER MATERIALS HE COULD ADD TO AN ABANDONED HUT. HE HAD STUM BLED ACROSS, BEYOND SET BESIDE A BROOK WITH FRUIT TREES AND VEGETABLES ONCE PLANTED BUT NOW LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES. HE USHERED ME INSIDE TO FIND A LARGE FLAT STONE, ROUNDED BY THE GROUND BUILDING, THERE A PLACE INTO TWO WITH A SIMPLE WALL OF WOVEN BAMBOO ON ONE SIDE, BEYOND WHICH WAS A PALLET AS HIS BED. HE OFFERED ME THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FIRE PLACE SET IN A NATURAL HEARTH IN THE CENTRE OF THE GREAT STONE AND DRAGGED AN OLD MATTRESS COVERED WITH DRIED AND SHROBBED BAMBOO LEAVES FROM THE DARK RECESS BEHIND HIS BED TO SERVE AS A MATTRESS. THEN HE LIT THE FIRE AND SET ABOUT PREPARING A SIMPLE BUT DELICIOUS MEAL IN AN ANKLE DEEP

TICKED REPEAT SEEN REPEAT BUT REAL THEM WAS COMPARED TO HIS HOME AND IMMEDIATE SURROUNDS OF VEGETABLES AND ORCHARDS. IN AMONGST THE WERE EIGHT OR WHILE. PINES AND OTHER TREES BEHIND HIS MOST SPECTACULAR SCULPTURE HAD LARGE FOR THE PAINTING TABLE FOR A GARDEN THE SPACE AROUND WAS STRAIGHT CAREFULLY TENDED.

HE RECOUNTED THE STRANGEST OF STORIES. HE WAS A STONE FOLK. BA HAD BROUGHT NO SENSE WITH HIM PLANNING INSTEAD TO SEEK SOME OUT IN THE SURROUNDING AREA. HE FOUND NONE AND AROUND THE IDEA IN MIND OF PAINTING STONES. HE HAD NO SKILL WITH A TUG ON THE SURFACE OF A STILL FOND FED BY THE NEARBY BROOK. ONE EVENING HE PAINTED A PROXY LARVA INTERESTING STONE THAT SEEMED TO TAKE ON MORE TO REMAIN ONLY IN HIS MIND SEEMED TO LINGER AND THEN KNEW SIGHTY ABOUT THE SURFACE ACQUIRING TINTS OF COLOUR. HE PUT IT DOWN AT FIRST TO BE QUARANTINE AGAIN, BUT HIS CREATIVITY THAT NIGHT HOWEVER HE DREAMED OF THE STONE IN MUCH GREATER DETAIL AS IF IT HAD APPEARED IN THE WORLD OF DUST.

THE NEXT MORNING AT THE PRINCE OF THE FINE FOREST HE SAW A CLINT OF COLOUR CLEARLY DIFFERENT FROM THE TREES WITH THE SUNLIGHT DAPPLEING THROUGH THEIR BRANCHES THERE IT WAS SET ON A NEATLY CLEARED PATCH OF GROUND. THE STONE OF HIS DREAM AS HE GAZED IN WONDER AT IT THERE APPEARED A STRANGE STILL LIKE WISP OF SMOKE LIKE DENSE SMOKE ALTHOUGH HE HAD LIT NONE. THUS COULD IT CONSTANTLY CHANGING FORM THEN APPEARED AS A SHIMMERING DUST WHO PAUSED ABOVE THE STONE SPOKE TO HIM. THEN DISAPPEARED AMONG THE BRANCHES

He recounted the strangest of stories. He was a stone fool, but had brought no stones with him, planning instead to seek some out in the surrounding area. He found none and abandoned the idea in favour of painting stones instead. This he did mostly with a twig on the surface of a still pond fed by the nearby brook. One evening he painted a particularly intriguing stone that seemed to take on more substance than usual, and instead of disappearing straight away to remain only in his mind, seemed to linger and then rise slightly above the surface, acquiring tints of colour. He put it down at first to the plum wine augmenting his creativity. That night, however, he dreamed of the stone, in much greater detail, as if it had appeared in the world of dust. The next morning, at the fringe of the pine forest he saw a glint of colour clearly different from the trees with the sunlight dappling through their branches. There it was, set on a neatly cleared patch of ground: the stone of his dream. As he gazed in wonder at it, there appeared a strange sylph-like wisp of clouds, like incense smoke although he had lit none, that circled it, constantly changing form, then appearing as a shimmering deity who paused above the stone, bowed to him, then disappeared as music rustled in the branches.

About a year later the same thing happened, only this time when he gazed at it in the morning it was accompanied by an image of a hare, which also bowed to him, then arced upwards towards the pale full moon in the morning sky.

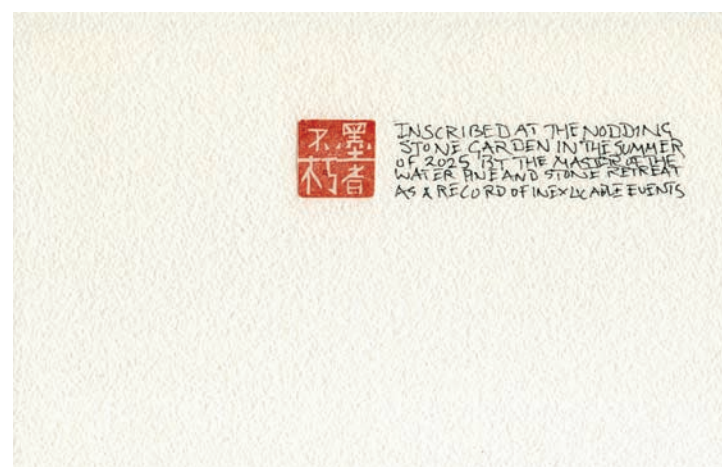
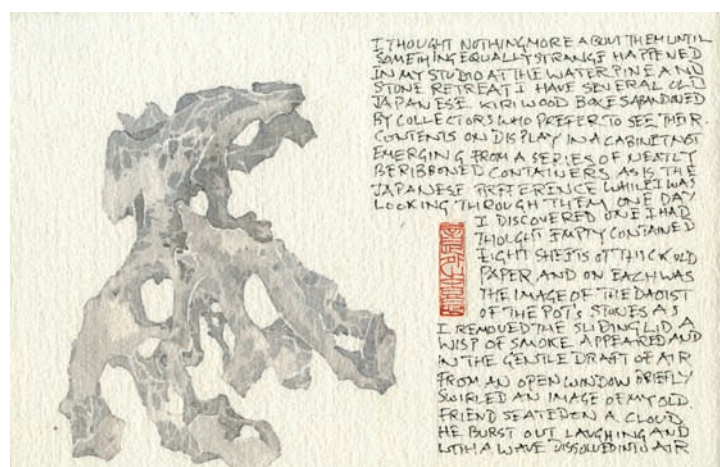
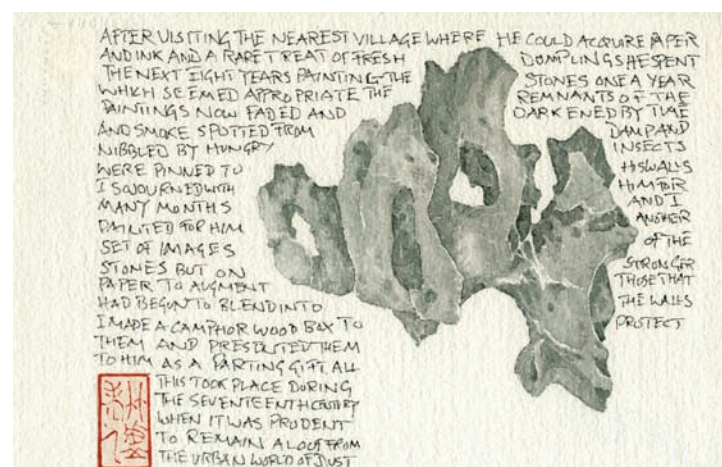
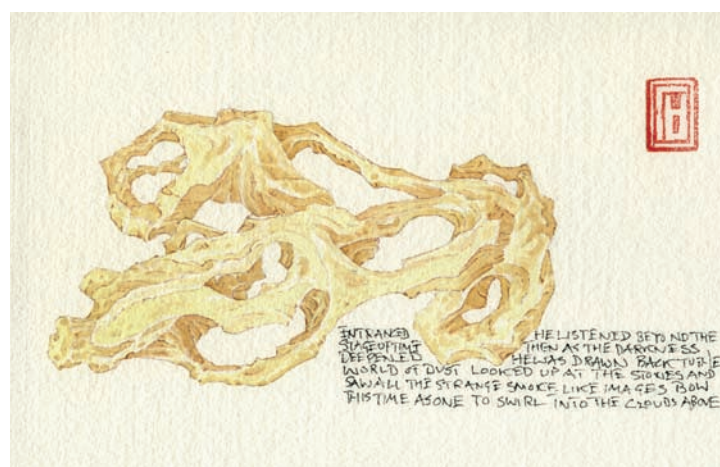
One more year passed and another stone appeared, then a year later one more, and so forth, each accompanied by different mysterious images as attendants. Some of the messages were clear enough, although he was wise enough to know that they were probably just his interpretations projected onto the strange phenomena, but he still couldn't explain the phenomena themselves. But the inexplicable was fine with him.

With the last of the eight stone dreams, he rushed out in the morning but there was no stone to add to the previous seven, each in its miraculously manicured space. Puzzled, he returned home, and that evening was enjoying some wine when he heard the music. Following the sound, he was drawn back into the trees to find the eighth stone, and floating near each was its avatar, each playing an instrument to create the ethereal sound he heard. It was like no other music he knew, that, like the strange stones themselves, or the Dao, was more a part of a unified luminous experience. Entranced, he listened beyond the Stage of Time. Then, as the darkness deepened, he was drawn back to the world of dust, looked up at the stones, and saw all the strange smoke-like images bow, this time as one, to swirl into the clouds above.

After visiting the nearest village where he could acquire paper and ink, and a rare treat of fresh dumplings, he spent the next eight years painting the stones, one a year, which seemed appropriate. The remnants of the paintings, now faded and darkened by time and smoke, spotted from damp and nibbled by hungry insects, were pinned to his walls. I sojourned with him for many months, and I painted for him another set of images of the stones but on stronger paper to augment those that had begun to blend into the walls. I made a camphor-wood box to protect them and presented it to him as a parting gift. All this took place during the troubled times in the mid-seventeenth century, when it was prudent to remain aloof from the urban world of dust.

I thought no more about them until something equally strange happened. In my studio at the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat I have several old Japanese *kiri*-wood boxes abandoned by collectors who prefer to see their contents on display in a cabinet, not emerging from a series of neatly beribboned containers as is the Japanese preference. While looking through them one day I discovered one I had thought empty contained eight sheets of thick old paper and on each was the image of one of the Daoist of the Pot's stones. As I removed the sliding lid, a wisp of smoke appeared, and in the gentle draught of air from an open window briefly swirled an image of my old friend seated on a cloud. He burst out laughing as he dissolved into the air.

Inscribed at the Nodding Stone Garden in the summer of 2025
by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat as a record of inexplicable events.





A NOTE ON SEALS

THE MASTER OF the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat has over one hundred seals (and counting) to choose from when completing a painting. They range from name seals (his Chinese names and a series of adopted sobriquets) to *haiku* messages of meaning to poetic sentiments to images. Some he has commissioned from famous seal carvers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and China; some were carved by artist friends as gifts; and some are old seals collected over half a century, many of which became appropriate when he began to paint, so he appropriated them.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Let Ink Be My Immortality

Ink Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Beijing: Ping Art Space, 10 May – 10 June 2014

Taipei: Ping Art Space, 6–20 June 2014

In the Alembic of Ink

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Hong Kong: Convention and Exhibition Centre, 29 May – 1 June 2015,
organised as a non-selling adjunct to the International Antiques Fair by

Priscilla and William Chak

The Inner Realm of Staves and Stones

Ink Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Taipei: Ping Art Space, 27 May – 4 June 2016

Beijing: Zhiguan Art Museum, 2–31 July 2016, organised by Ping Art

Transmutations

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Wuhan: Yiyuan Art Space, 28 October 2016 – 4 January 2017

Hugh Moss

Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Hong Kong: Hong Kong Club, 31 October 2016 – 9 February 2017

Beyond the Stage of Time

Artworks by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Taipei: Ping Art Space, 19 September – 17 October 2020

Lanqing Preference

Blue-and-Green Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, November 2020

Through the Gates of Wonder

Exhibition of Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
from the K. Y. Ng Collection

Hong Kong: Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2–5 May 2022

Transmutations

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

Wuhan: Quintai Art Museum, 30 April – 1 August 2024

JOINT EXHIBITIONS

Shuimo/Water Ink: Chinese Contemporary Ink Paintings

New York: Sotheby's S|2 Gallery, 14–28 March 2013

Now and Then: Contemporary Ink vs Antiquities

Hong Kong: Lucie Chang Fine Arts and the Fringe Club, 2–12 October 2013

Shuimo/Water Ink: Enchanted Landscapes

New York: Sotheby's S|2 Gallery, 14–28 March 2014

Meditations in Nature: New Ink

Hong Kong: Ben Brown Gallery, 27 March – 7 May 2014

Collectors as Artists

Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, Art Central, 14–16 March 2015

A Tale of Two Cities: Painting and Calligraphy by Shanghai and Hong Kong Artists

Hong Kong: Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre, October 2015

The Literati Within

New York: Sotheby's S|2 Gallery, 10–20 March 2016

Strange Stones

Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 20 March – 9 April 2016

Strange Stones and Stranger Beasts

Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, March–April 2017

Novel Ink: Collection of Chinese Contemporary Ink Art

Taipei: Ping Art Space, June 2017

Four Accomplishments in Ink: Liu Dan, Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, Xu Lei, Zeng Xiaojun

New York: INKstudio at J.J. Lally & Co., 13–29 March 2019

The Experience of Looking

Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, Hong Kong Arts Centre, 2–10 June 2019

The Rhythm of Line: Contemporary Hong Kong Ink Art

Hong Kong: City Hall, June 2022

By the People: Creative Chinese Characters

Hong Kong: Museum of Art, 9 September 2022 – 26 November 2023

The Realm of Ink Immortality

Shanghai: Wosee Space, 3 June – 1 July 2023

SELECTED BOOKS AND ESSAYS

Hugh Moss, *The Experience of Art: Twentieth Century Paintings from the Shuisongshi Shanfang Collection*, 4 vols (Hong Kong: Umbrella, i 1983, ii 1985, iii 1990, iv 1992), including 'A Unified Theory of Art' in iii, *Ho Huai-shuo's Four Seasons Handscroll*, 13–33

Hugh Moss, 'An Artist's Perspective: How Art Works'
Orientalism, March 2013, 186–188

Olivia Wang, *Let Ink Be My Immortality: Ink Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat* (Taipei: Ping Art Space, 2014)
Essays: Olivia Wang, 'Let Ink Be My Immortality'
Don J. Cohn, 'Magic on Paper'

Hugh Moss, *The Art of Understanding Art: A New Perspective*
(London: Profile Books, 2015)

Transmutations: The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat
(Wuhan: Yiyuan Art Space, 2016)
Foreword: Xu Yongmin, Chancellor, Hubei Institute of Fine Art,
'Garden at the Edge of the Universe'
Preface: Zeng Fangang, 'Writing Before the Exhibition'
Essays: The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, 'Transmutations'
Huang Hsuan-lung, 'An Expedition into the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'
Gladys Chung, 'Chinese Rock Paintings and the Master of the Water, Pine
and Stone Retreat'

'Spirit of the Literati and Enjoying Stones: Shuisongshi shanfang zhuren,
Hugh Moss', in *Literati Space* (Beijing: Xilin yinshi chubanshe, 2016), 135–141

Zhang Yuchen, 'Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat brings new
form of rock to Chinese literati painting'
Global Times (Wuhan), 6 November 2016

Rupert Nicholl, 'Hugh Moss: Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine
and Stone Retreat'
Hong Kong Club News, December 2016

Hugh Moss, 'A Unified Theory of Art: Making Sense of It All'
Still Point Arts Quarterly, Spring 2017

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, Beyond the Stage of Time,
catalogue raisonné, 2 vols, *Realised Realms* and *Staff Masters and Stone Fools*
(Hong Kong: Rasti Chinese Art, 2020)

Through the Gates of Wonder: Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat from the K. Y. Ng Collection

(Hong Kong: CA Design, 2022)

Essays: Hugh Moss, 'Painting the Dao'

Tiffany Wai-ying Beres, 'The Creative Journey of the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'

Pan Wenxun, 'To Hugh Moss from Afar'

Hugh Moss, *Art Reboot: A transcultural re-evaluation of the nature and purpose of art that finds in China's ancient past the resolution of global confusion in the modern art world*

(Hong Kong: OM Publishing, 2022)

Charlene Co and Wendy Guo, 'The Depths of Ink: Celebrated collector, artist and scholar of Chinese aesthetics Hugh Moss creates transcultural masterpieces that take you on a journey of self-discovery'

Magnifissance: Timeless Beauty and Wisdom, 124, Spring 2024

Kexin Ma, 'Exhibition Review'

(of 'Transmutations', Quintai Art Museum, Wuhan, 2024)

Orientations, July/August 2024

Transmutations, bilingual catalogue of 2024 exhibition

(Wuhan: Quintai Art Museum, 2025)

MEDIA

Mark French, *In the Alembic of Ink*

Hong Kong Convention Centre, May 2015 (video)

<https://shorturl.at/0L6ip>

Leo Abrahams, *Mosaic*, 2019 (video)

<https://shorturl.at/OFLtr>

'In Conversation with Hugh Moss', Phillips, 4 December 2019 (text)

<https://www.phillips.com/article/52123497/in-conversation-with-hugh-moss-anglo-chinese-art>

Mark French, *Through the Gates of Wonder:*

The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, 2025 (video)

<https://shorturl.at/i9UB4>

COLLECTORS

Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine, and Stone Retreat are in the following collections, excluding those sold by agents or at auction houses in New York, London, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and elsewhere.

Leo Abrahams	Ling Chao
Pola Antebi	Liu Dan
Austen Collection	Liu Kuo-sung
Mr & Mrs Robert Brandt	Mr & Mrs John P. Miller
Abby Chan	Moon Heart Studio Collection
Mr & Mrs Chan Kwan-lap	Melanie Moss
Elise Chen	Mr & Mrs Nicholas Moss
Colette Chilcott	Oliver Moss
Janine Chilcott	Nanshun Shanfang Collection
Nicolas Chow	K. Y. Ng
Clare Chu	Oak Barn Collection
Gladys Chung	Mr & Mrs Simon Overstall
The Crane Collection	Qintai Art Museum, Wuhan
Deng Xin	Wayne & Izabela Quasha
FranzArt Collection	Ruth Ross
Mr & Mrs Fung Ming-chip	The Rowfant Collection
Nina Gardiner	Mischa Salazar
Jen & Sean Geer	Mr & Mrs John Sawyer
Dessa Goddard	Lesley Shane
Robin Greetham	Joseph Shawcross
Michelle Han	Su Shyh-ting
Dr & Mrs Bruce Haughey	Rebecca Taylor Gray
Stephanie L'Heureux	Jana Volf
Mr & Mrs Richard Hext	Mr & Mrs Graham Walker
Ho Huai-shuo	Emily de Wolf Pettit
Linda & Rene Hodel	Xu Yongmin
James Hsu Chi-ping	Yan Zhi
Jessica Hsu & Huang Hsuan-lung	Yang Cheng
Yifawn Lee & Nader Rasti	Zeng Fangang
James Li	Zeng Fanzhi

201
 broke
 144
 back
 with
 hands
 -
 into
 dragon

Inscribed to him the
Master of the boat
Tint and Stone
Tint and Stone
Gardner at the
Falls of the
newest cutting





HUGH MOSS has been hiding with brush and ink behind the sobriquet the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat for so long, enjoying, beyond the Stage of Time, the company of staff masters, stone fools and other immortals of the world of creativity, that he has rather lost track of who he is, or what that could possibly mean. Fact has it that he was born in Wimbledon in 1943, indifferently educated at a Quaker school, managed to avoid any formal art education in favour of acting as agent for some of the greatest Chinese artists of the past half-century, and found, to his gathering delight and thanks to their enlightened encouragement, that there was no reason why he couldn't do what they were doing. But he only trusts facts up to a point, and is also rather suspicious of points.

AK24.79 *Water, Pine and Stone Conversation*
Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
78 × 101 cm, Hong Kong, November 2024

Design Stuart



Bonhams

